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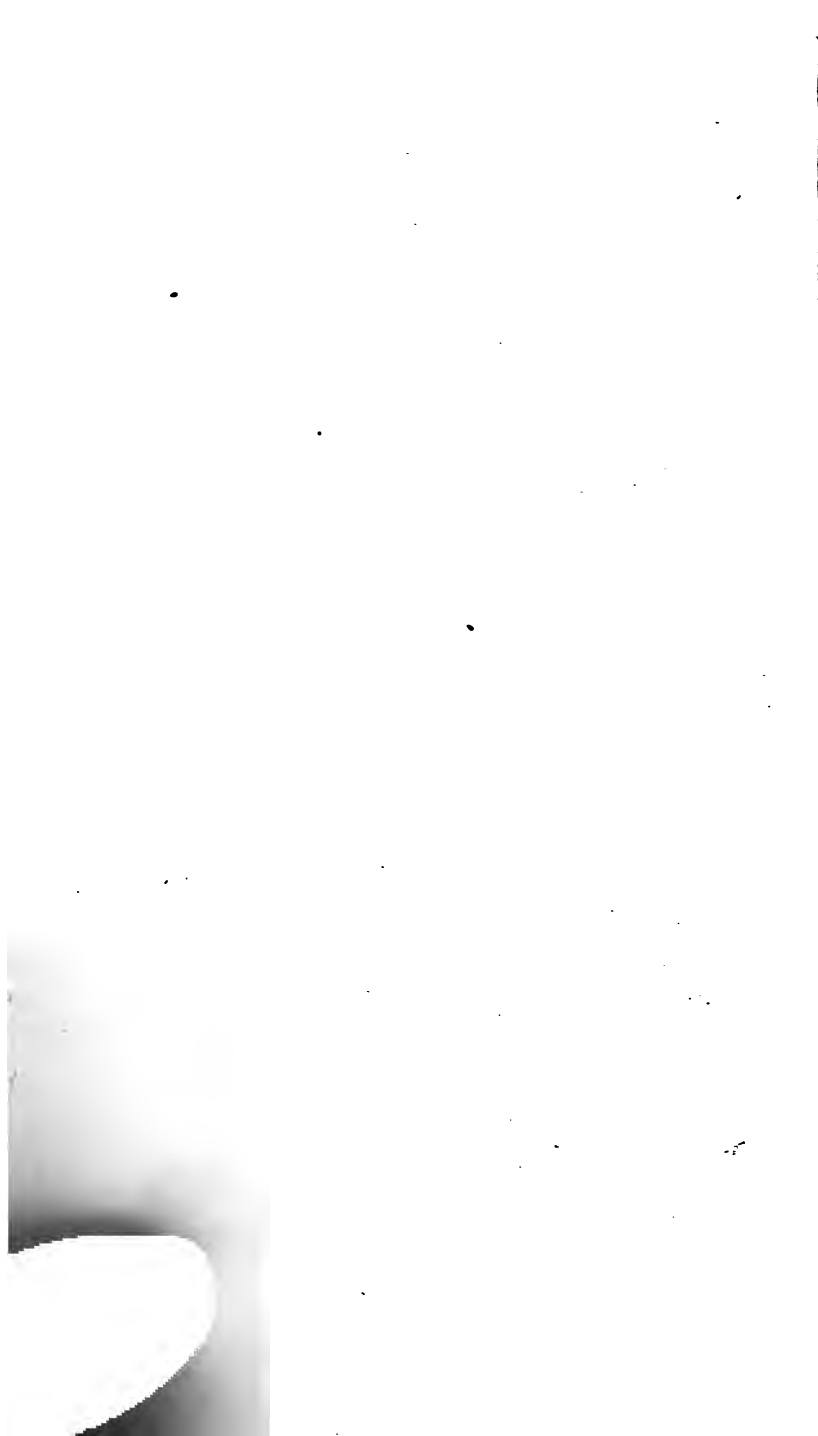


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G A B R I E L L E;
OR,
P I C T U R E S O F A R E I G N.

VOL. I .

T. C. NEWBY, Printer, 65, Mortimer Street, Cavendish Square.

GABRIELLE;
OR,
PICTURES OF A REIGN.

A HISTORICAL NOVEL,
BY LOUISA STUART COSTELLO,

AUTHOR OF
"A SUMMER AMONGST THE BOCAGES AND THE
VINES," "A PILGRIMAGE TO AUVERGNE,"
"THE QUEEN MOTHER," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

L O N D O N :

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GABRIELLE;
OR,
PICTURES OF A REIGN.

CHAPTER I.

THE COURT.

La chasse court—le cerf fuit—le cor sonne---Noble Forêt!
RONDRAU.

THE deep, luxuriant allées of the beautiful forest of Fontainebleau echoed to the sound of the horn and the cries of the noble huntsmen who pursued their favourite sport beneath those magnificent trees and amidst those rich glades which can find few rivals in Europe.

Cavaliers mounted on fiery coursers, and ladies, with robes and feathers flaunting in the wind, passed like figures in a fairy pageant through the leafy arcades, and were lost to sight in an instant: merry laughter and musical voices sounded along the avenues of waving pines and the whole forest was alive with mirth and movement.

In one of the fine wide openings which occur amongst the clustering woods and form a kind of verdant saloon, from whence a dozen vistas extend, branching forth as far as sight can reach, forming, as it were, the rays of a star, sat a party, the brilliancy of whose attire and the nobility of whose appearance declared at once their exalted rank.

The chief objects of attention in this bright circle were two persons both remarkable by their superior attractions of mien and manners. The one was the King, Louis the Fourteenth, then in the height of his *bel age*: his tall, graceful and well proportioned figure animated

countenance and fine features, together with a certain air of unapproachable dignity, tempered with softness and affability of demeanour, rendered him altogether one of the handsomest and most pleasing men of his time. He was at this period in the very zenith of his glory; he saw the whole world at his feet; riches, honours, fame and admiration surrounded him with a halo of enjoyment, he had but to cast his eyes around, to speak one soft word, and he was master of every heart and could command every mind.

Intoxicated with success, and, as yet, ignorant of the effects of reverses, he saw all succumb to his will. Wherever he moved he seemed to east a breeze of joy, his subjects were said to adore him, his rivals to fear him and his friends to obey him in his every wish. All gave way to him, nothing resisted his command and he would have been one of too much enjoyment but for the exciting

anxieties of that passion which was then called love.

In a court filled with beauty of the most refined and perfect description, it was almost difficult to select any one in particular on whom to bestow the palm: and to be pronounced beautiful where all were lovely was a distinction as rare as it was gratifying, in that dominion of vanity where conquest was the sole object and where all the arts of accomplished coquetry were directed to attract the attention of one exposed to become sated and surfeited with endless delight.

Yet this great end and aim had been, for the thousandth time, accomplished by the angelic creature who, seated on the velvet turf beneath a spreading beech, was the second of those persons already named.

She was in the first bloom of youth, and so exquisitely and delicately lovely, that the resplendent beauties who crowded near were quite eclipsed by the lustre of her appearance. So

said the obsequious courtiers, who observed the effect of her charms on their volatile master, and so thought the fastidious yet sensitive monarch himself, as he gazed upon her with unrepressed admiration, notwithstanding the presence of many before whom it might have been more prudent as well as more proper to dissemble.

Marie Angelique de Scoraille, better known as Mademoiselle de Fontanges, was above the ordinary height, with a figure, slight, but rounded with all the exquisite grace of the most perfect specimen of Grecian art, every movement had a charm, every glance a spell: her complexion was dazzlingly fair; her hands and arms models of perfection; her cheek was tinged with the softest tint of crimson which at every moment went and came like the flickering of the sunbeams through a tree covered with roses; her mouth was small and seemed a scarlet shell filled with little pearls: her soft clear blue eyes beamed through their long lashes

now with a sweet, languishing expression, and now with a mirthful joyousness that gave them the brightness of shattered sapphires. Her luxuriant hair was of a rich auburn which in the sun appeared a blaze of gold, its natural ringlets wantoned over her polished neck and waved and twined like tendrils of the vine.

She wore a riding dress of pale blue velvet, embroidered so profusely in a rich pattern of silver as almost to conceal the texture beneath : this dress fitted closely to her shape and marked its exquisite proportions. On her head was a small black velvet cap, called a capeline, ornamented with a plume of white feathers carelessly placed without order, and forming a head-dress which few besides herself would have ventured to wear.

The evening breeze of a warm summer's day was just beginning to refresh the air, and the coquettish beauty suddenly exclaimed, as she threw herself back on her mossy seat and reached out her pretty hand :

“ Ah, Sire ! my plume will fly away—give me the ribbon at your breast that I may chain the rebel.”

The gallant and enamoured monarch bent down towards her and kneeling on one knee instantly detached a blue and silver ribbon which he wore, and to which a jewel was attached, and presented it with a fond pressure of the hand that caught it playfully from him.

“ Enchanting creature !” whispered he—
“ would not a word, a look of yours be enough to keep prisoner the most unstable thing in nature !”

A glance of tender meaning rewarded this speech as the gratified beauty busied herself in twining the ribbon, which she had kissed and pressed to her heart, round her hair, looping it over some of the refractory feathers and tying it in a large knot, the ends of which fell over her snowy forehead.

“ Tell me, St. Aignan,” said she to a courtier

near who stood in rapt admiration,—“ have I disfigured myself by this awkward headdress?”

“ Can the hands of a divinity produce anything but grace!” exclaimed he to whom she appealed. “ Look, Sire—if indeed you dare—was there ever costume beheld so bewitching?”

“ It is perfection!” cried Louis, gazing on her smiling face with rapture; “ grace and beauty never were so adorned before. I implore you, sweet Marie, not to change this delicious head dress to-day—the charming caprice becomes you so divinely. St. Aignan, you must positively write a poem on this occasion—Marie has not yet heard those exquisite lines you composed on the new tapestry which I ordered to be placed in her saloon. Repeat the verses to her I entreat.”

“ Your majesty,” said the Courtier, “ is too indulgent and overrates my poor attempt to celebrate the most dazzling charms that have ever yet bewildered the brain of a poor poet. As the tapestry represented the conquests of the

king the superior conquest of the lover naturally suggested itself."

He then repeated the lines which were soon on every tongue at Court, and created sensations in many hearts far less pleasureable than those felt by the vain and beautiful Marie and her adorer of the moment.

TO IRIS.

" Amidst those woven conquests, wide and vast,
In ev'ry fight the hero stands confest,
But where is that, the sweetest and the last,
That gives more glory far than all the rest?

We know to gain a town or win a heart
In vain resistance to his sword, or eyes.
But of all triumphs where he bore a part,
The heart of Iris is the highest prize.

With smiles and blushes the lovely favourite acknowledged the compliment; pride, happiness, exultation, and delight, beamed in her countenance as she accepted the arm of the fascinated Louis, and the pair strolled away along one of

the flowery glades, followed at a discreet distance, by several of the party.

There were three ladies who did not however quit their seats under the trees, and who, left almost alone, remained thoughtful and silent, each apparently occupied in absorbing reveries.

One of these fair dreamers was considerably older than the beautiful being distinguished by the king's attention, but her charms were nevertheless of a high order. Her hair, eyes, shape, and gait, were faultless; vivacity and spirit sparkled in her glance, and but for the contraction of her brow at the present moment, her face left nothing to desire on the score of beauty, though there might be seen traces of ungovernable passion, which, if roused, threatened to change the goddess into a fury. Such was Madame de Montespan, who, with angry and excited feelings, had watched the countenance of her rival, while words, which she was too far off to hear, but which she rightly

guessed, were poured into her ear by the faithless man whose heart, till now, she flattered herself was all her own.

She sat with her bright eyes bent on the ground, and tapped the green sward with a tiny, restless foot.

“ I have been dangerously imprudent,” said she, mentally. “ What folly induced me to draw his attention to this pretty rustic of Limousin? She would have passed unnoticed in the train of Madame, if I had not officiously prattled of her singular beauty, and while I tried to abash and frighten the awkward country girl, by drawing all the eyes of the court upon her, I was exciting the pity of Louis, and pointing out to him a means of wounding me. At first this inclination answered my purpose, in detaching him from his *friendly* intercourse with Scarron, but I see it becomes too serious. He forgets everything besides; this must not last, or if it does Les Amis may be necessary.” As she made the last reflection she bit her lip,

and a sudden paleness overspread her countenance, while a look of malignity passed over her beautiful face, rendering it for the moment almost hideous, like the slime of a snake over a bed of flowers.

Thoughts like these which occupied the mind of the hitherto unapproached divinity, who for more than ten years had reigned supreme, were shared by a demure, plain-looking, grave personage, who sat by her side, in whose countenance sense and expression held the place of positive beauty, and whose dark meaning eyes followed the direction of the royal lover's walk.

"So," thought Madame de Maintenon, for this person was no other than the widow of the comic poet, "my dominion is once more interrupted—these beauties give me much to struggle with—time and caution will be required before my triumph is secured. Louis is deaf to my advice on this subject, and I see that I may not venture it too far. It is better

perhaps to leave him to his inclination—it cannot last, for the doll de Scoraille has no mind, the ‘esprit de Mortimar—’ and as the thought passed, she glanced at de Montespan—“is not in her; she is as lovely and senseless as the rose of a day, and will fade as quickly. It is at least an advantage to have detached him for a time from the chain which has too long bound him.”

She who formed the third of this reflective group was a small, delicate woman below the middle height, extremely fair, with an expression of goodness and benevolence on her countenance. Her figure was elegant and dignified, although somewhat short, which slight defect she endeavoured to remedy by wearing high-heeled shoes, and a head dress piled up with ribbons and feathers, which formed as striking a contrast to the easy style generally adopted at court, as her reserved and modest manners did to those of the ladies by whom she was surrounded.

She looked careworn and sad, and the forced smile of content which she had striven to exhibit while the king was near had entirely passed away, leaving her cheek pale and inanimate, and her eyes dim with tears, which she could not restrain, and which fell on the clasped hands which rested in her lap.

“ Alas !” she sighed, “ is my heart never to be at peace—never to be rewarded—for all this patient endurance and devotion? When the penitent Lavalière, whose error caused her as many tears as I had shed myself—when she retired from the scene of her triumph and misfortune, I trusted to regain his affection—then came the fatal Montespan, who has usurped my place so long in spite of her violence and uncongenial temper. This attachment I hoped was lately weakened by the singular friendship he has evinced for the widow Scarron—how she sits watching, with her large shrewd eyes, his every movement ! Her design is no common one, but while I live—while I am still a

queen—what can she gain? She has neither youth nor beauty to serve her—it is not that—she will subdue him by her force of mind. Her aim is inscrutable to me. But this lovely vision—this dangerous syren—all youth, and grace, and seduction! Oh! why had I not all the charms of these women? or why have I a heart that trembles with unreturned affection? Why do I still love him, and thus die a thousand deaths of sorrow and regret, while he is still gentle, kind, indulgent, even fond? Oh! anything but true.”

Thus mused Marie Thérèse of Austria, as her tearful eyes marked the steps of the gay and gallant husband, to whom she had the misfortune to be really attached.

While these thoughts were passing in the minds of the three persons of whom Louis was the load-star, the courtiers were occupied in making observations on the scene. A group of elegant young men, dressed in the very height of fashion, were lounging under the shades and

conversing together; the chief of these were, Brancas, celebrated as the most successful gambler of the day, La Trousse, Langlée, and de Grammont, the last the most witty, profligate and amusing of his genus.

"She is certainly divine!" said de Grammont, "the king has exquisite taste it must be confessed, but he is vulgarly in love, and for us it is positively stupid to look on. Have you seen Ninon to-day?"

"Of course," answered Brancas, "she is more heavenly than ever, and last night at the opera looked as young as the divine Marie herself. She is occupied entirely just now with the intention of making a new conquest—we are all to meet him to-night at her house. He comes out there and appears at court, when she has pronounced upon him."

"You mean the inimitable Lomaria," said de Grammont, "I have seen him. All Bretagne cannot produce his fellow. He has a name too which one *can* pronounce without

a lock jaw, but, I entreat you, never call him by his barbarous title, it will ruin him in spite of his glorious dancing."

"You mean Marquis de Giverrand?" exclaimed La Trousse, "where do these Bretons get their hideous titles from? What a misfortune that the sea does not overwhelm the whole country—the very thought of so coarse and horrible a region is enough to destroy the strongest nerves."

"But Lomaria," said de Grammont gravely, "redeems the race—he is all virtue—all beauty—all perfection. Faultless in mind and body as his unapproachable dancing proves. Who ever saw such steps—who ever gazed upon so much grace? I am lame and halt from this moment till I have learnt to imitate his *passe-pieds*. Ninon vows we must never dare to dance before her till we have practised this wonderful art—enough to make a man immortal. Good heaven! what besides is worth living for!"

"We owe him to de Sevigné," said Langlée.
"He caught him in Brittany, and brought him to Paris to enchant us all."

"Yes," remarked Pomenars, who just joined them, "it happened to be convenient to him—he could not well stay after an affair in which he had killed one of his savages—something about a handsome girl with whom the brute was in love—he stabbed the fellow, and the old lady of Nevers, his mother, took up the quarrel and protects her drove. I am, as you know, Breton myself, and know them, Lomaria was obliged to conceal himself, for those barbarians cried for vengeance—de Sevigné advised his coming to Paris, and here he is."

"But," said La Trousse, "the Breton rebels intend, it seems, to appeal to the king, and it is said he will be tried for murder. Is it quite prudent his running into the lion's mouth?"

"The safest thing he could do," said de Grammont, "he would have been condemned if he had staid in Brittany. Let Louis once

see his divine dancing, and he is conquered—let him but observe the manner of his entering a room—his style of putting on his plumed hat to begin the dance, and none but an inhuman tyrant could harbour a particle of anger towards him, if he had killed an emperor! What is the academy, all in a body, compared to him?—mere automats! What is Tiberio Fiorelli himself—stiffness and awkwardness enshrined? He is worthy to be canonised—let us think of nothing but Lomaria. Let us live for nothing but his *passe-pieds*!”

They were at this stage of de Grammont’s extravagant enthusiasm joined by several ladies, all of whom listened to the praises of this accomplished young Breton with delighted attention. The King and his beautiful favourite were amongst the number of listeners and caught the mania of the moment.

It was agreed that at the approaching ball at Court, one of the numerous entertainments on the tapis in honour of the proposed marriage of

Mademoiselle de Blois and the Prince de Conti, that de Sevigné and Lomaria should be received and the King should judge of the praises bestowed so liberally upon the noble Breton were well merited.

The Queen meantime, amongst all the persons present was the only one silent and unmoved by the absurd and violent admiration expressed by those around her of a person whom few of them knew, and whose only quality mentioned was his talent for dancing. She sighed deeply and turned away.—“ And this man has murdered a fellow-creature—one too who loved,” she mentally exclaimed : “ can this Lomaria be the son of the excellent Madame de Nevers, whose soul is all benevolence and goodness. Strange freaks has nature if it be so !”

The queen addressed herself to one of her ladies, and from various enquiries that she made found that this Lomaria, Marquis de Giverrand, was indeed the unworthy son of

excellent parents ; that he was as much hated in the country as his father had been loved ; and that so fearful and dangerous had he become in the neighbourhood, that it was said his mother, whenever he went out, was accustomed to have the great bell of the castle rung, to warn the inhabitants that their enemy was abroad.

He was, although thoroughly vicious and unprincipled, cruel and tyrannous, a very miracle of beauty and grace ; and his manners and appearance were so captivating, that all the stories recounted of him were forgotten or disbelieved the moment he appeared.

Such was the dangerous man who had lately arrived in Paris to add another to the list of profligates who swarmed in that gay capital, and to teach the performance of

“ The oldest sins, the newest kind of ways.”

His reputation, bad as it was, gave him a

charm amongst the dissolute young men of the day, and the fame of his beauty excited the eager curiosity of the thoughtless women who lived but for excitement and amusement, careless of all consequences, present or future.

“ Does not your majesty think it disgraceful,” said Angelique de Meri, one of the queen’s maids of honour, “ that a man known to have committed so great a crime, should be praised and sought after in this manner. For my part, if I have ever the misfortune to meet him, I shall avoid him as I would Bras d’ Acier the brigand himself.”

“ Ah, you will change your mind depend on it,” interposed de Montesperan, who had heard the remark addressed to the queen, “ no one ever saw Lomaria yet who could resist him. He is a very Cyrus, an *Amadis*, a hero of romance, more charming than Mademoiselle de la Fayette has ever described. Tell me what you think of him this day week, I give you no longer time.”

"Beauty," returned Angelique "never makes an impression on me—I mean *mere* beauty. I regard it as I would a picture, but unless that mind is filled with generous virtues, beauty disgusts rather than delights."

"Charming Angelique!" laughed de Montespan, "how little you know of yourself and the world. Besides what has one to do with virtues if a man looks quite as handsome without."

The queen frowned, and Angelique blushed with anger, as the lovely mistress of the inconstant king turned away with a gay air and joined her royal lover, whose eyes were at that moment directed towards her. It was evident to Angelique that de Montespan was entertaining the king with her sentiments, and she saw by their laughter that her simplicity was the object of their ridicule.

"It is strange," said Angelique de Meri to herself, "that every expression of disgust at wickedness and profligacy is received here with

ridicule and contempt—that nothing is admired or tolerated but frivolity and folly—alas ! worse qualities even than these win favour at court. Why did my fate lead me from the peaceful solitude of my native mountains to such an atmosphere as this !”

“ Angelique,” said the queen, who divined the turn her thoughts had taken—“ do not imagine, because you hear vice advocated without a voice that dares to reply—do not believe that you alone condemn and despise what too many are obliged to be blind to. Alas ! would that Louis would listen more to his own heart, and less to the seductive notes that lure him to amusement, purchased at any price.”

“ Madam,” said Angelique, “ you are the queen, your voice should be the most powerful ; and its counsel would be virtue—why do you not exert it more.”

When she had spoken, Mademoiselle de Meri felt half afraid that her words were too frank ; for little accustomed to a court, and its

etiquettes, she had not learnt to weigh every syllable before it was uttered; but the smile of the queen, mournful as it was, re-assured her. Marie Thérèse laid one hand gently on her arm, while she pointed with the other to a group before them.

“Look at those three women,” said she, “they must all be removed from him before advice of mine can reach my husband’s ear.”

Angelique kissed the hand of her royal mistress respectfully, and was silent. At this moment Louis approached, and in a playful tone addressed the pair.

“Your majesty and your pretty mentor,” said he, “look quite scared—one would think a wolf had appeared before you. St. Aignan, de Grammont, have you not a lay to charm away this gloom? Awake, I beseech you, the echoes of the forest, with a strain able to draw the wood-nymphs from their haunts to listen. The fair Mademoiselle de Meri, I fear, believes that virtue and propriety live only amongst

the shades of her native Auvergne. Let us convince her, at least, that gaiety and pleasure are to be found nearer the capital."

The king's invitation was quickly attended to; St Aignan, ever prompt in his duty as a courtier, took a lute from an attendant, and, without hesitation, played a lively air, accompanying it with words of his own composition :—

SONG.

How can they whose lives are past
In dull study, toil, and care,
Know the joys that lovers taste,
Or the woes that lovers share?
How can any sing a theme,
Which in books alone they know,
All their knowledge is a dream,
Our's is real, joy or woe.

More than any learned page,
Gentle looks and voices move,
He is but an idle sage,
Who would write the lore of love.
We, who teach its mystery,
Have no books but smiles and sighs,
And the lamp to read them by
Is the light of Beauty's eyes.

“Alas!” sighed the king, with affected sadness, “how gaily you sing, St. Aignan—

‘Le mal d’amour est plus grand qu’on ne pense!’

give me the instrument, though I am but a poor performer.”

As he spoke he tuned the lute, and with much skill and grace, in a tone of assumed melancholy, sang as follows, as he lay at the feet of the blushing and gratified beauty, whose empire was at this moment at its height:—

SONG.

My sword is rusting in its sheath,
 Again I needs must try its power;
 Since not for me is twined the wreath,
 The golden wreath in beauty’s bower.
 Once more I’ll haste to seek the foe,
 On whom my wasted force to prove:
 Alas! there is but one I know,
 My only enemy is love!

My casque has long been thrown aside,
 And rosy chaplets bind my hair:
 To tend the fair is all my pride,
 To gain her smiles my only care.

Peace, through the land, extends her sway,
Ah ! let her tender influence move ;
And yielding beauty softly say,
The warrior has no foe in love !

As Louis ended his song he gazed for the answer to his complaint in the eyes of *Maïdemoiselle de Scoraille*, regardless of wounding any heart in the assembly. The queen turned pale, and pressed heavily on the arm of *Mademoiselle de Meri*, on whom she leant, but the eyes of the quick and violent *de Montespan* struck fire as she marked the careless effrontery of her lover's proceeding. She had restrained her feelings to the utmost throughout the day, but her anger and indignation had now reached its height.

"Give me the lute, *St. Aginan*," exclaimed she, | "his majesty has forgotten that there is another verse to this ballad, which is supposed to be sung by the false and treacherous knight *Lancelot*, who had betrayed every damsel who trusted and loved him." One whom

he had wronged answered his verses as follows :—

Oh, hush that lute's persuasive tone,
By thee too sweetly taught to feign,
Its melody is sound alone,
And truth avoids the fatal strain.
One who has known thy scorn too well,
Thy lays of falsehood would reprove,
Even from the grave she comes to tell,
How harsh a foe thou art to love."

She sang with a fire and meaning, which gave the utmost effect to her words, and every one who heard was startled at their expression. As she finished the instrument fell from her hand, and she sunk back, overcome with passionate emotion, with sobs and cries. All was now confusion—Louis, flattered, although annoyed, could not do otherwise than offer her instant attention, which however she scornfully refused, and, without attempting to conceal her anger, insisted that her carriage should be instantly called, that she might leave the spot.

The Queen, not sorry for an excuse to break up the party, rose and intimated her intention of returning to the Palace. The carriages were brought, and all the ladies accordingly took leave, the king assisting the pouting beauty into her's, and then returning to afford the like attention to her somewhat disconcerted rival. As Louis gave his hand to Madame de Maintenon, who accompanied de Montespan, he said to her in an under tone—"Will you permit me to see you alone to-morrow, I have much on which to request your advice, and with you, at least, I am certain of indulgence, as well as wisdom."

CHAPTER VI.

NINON.

Un viel amour ne saurait plaire,
On voudrait déjà qu'il fut mort ;
Quand il languit ou qu'il s'endort
Il est permis de s'en defaire.

ST. PAVIN.

SUCH might have been the motto of her who was at this period, as long before, the arbitress of fashion in the French metropolis, the witty, gay, singular, and dangerously lovely Ninon de l'Enclos.

She was said to divide Paris with the Court, from which she was rather excluded by her

own wish than from any feeling of morality which kept the equally indiscreet ladies of rank from familiarly associating with her. It was well known that many were her friends, and had she chosen to exert the interest she possessed with persons in high places there is little doubt but she might have held a place of which she was perhaps as worthy as many of her contemporaries, whose lives were scarcely less notorious, though screened by great names.

She had, however, a careless independence which made her avoid trammels of any kind, and she laughed at the etiquette which she could not have submitted to follow.

Her world was in her own circle, and comprised all that was gay, witty, accomplished and amusing. No one who was not distinguished for some quality tending to please found admission into her saloons; and not to be there admitted was to be cast out of fashionable society altogether.

Her dress, her manner, her style, all about

her was unstudied, free, and perfect in every point; the most exquisite taste reigned in every thing she did—her rooms, furniture, ornaments, pictures, statues—all was the very beau ideal of elegance and refinement. Not a shade of coarseness or impropriety betrayed the character of the brilliant company assembled—all that appeared outwardly was the pattern of whatever was desirable in the fashionable world.

To be of Ninon's society argued some merit of whatever kind—if not superior talent, superior beauty or manners or rank were necessary as a passport. The young men of fashion of the day took their degrees in this temple of the graces—the foppery of this hotel passed current everywhere, the follies and vices received here carried their weight in other circles—everything was tolerated but insipidity and vulgarity of manners. Pedantry was banished, but wit and talent reigned supreme—men of letters, of science, artists, actors, all were welcome; and, seen there, they were beheld in

perfection, for the atmosphere of Ninon's abode seemed their natural element.

It was well known that the heart of Ninon was the seat of the noblest sentiments, that her benevolence, generosity and goodness were unbounded, in fact, that "she had *all the virtues of an honest MAN*;" and consequently the very worst persons who frequented her assemblies were careful to conceal vices which she would not consider venial. Tyranny, cruelty, meanness, oppression and cowardice were held in abhorrence by her—though she could forgive extravagance, weakness, and all the faults that take their rise in folly or false feeling. She had a mind to discriminate closely, but she was not a severe judge of failings which she shared—all the wicked and vicious qualities to which her own mind was a stranger inspired her with disgust, and she would not afford her countenance to those possessed of them, if they came to her knowledge.

Her love of justice was predominant, and

her attachment to truth paramount. She never deceived, and hated deception in others, except in affairs of the heart, to which she was in every way indulgent: she could laugh at many things of this kind which she secretly blamed, but as she was far from setting up for a censor, she did not enquire into motives too closely, unless they were forced upon her. Beauty and genius found in her a ready patroness. Her faults were undeniable, and her [merits have been acknowledged by all.

“For the love of Heaven, de Seigné,” said Pomenars to his friend, as they rolled along in their carriage, on their way to take up the new star of fashion, Lomaria, in order to carry him to the hôtel de l’Enclos—“for the sake of all you hold dear, be careful to conceal from Ninon this affair of Lomaria and his vassal. She would take fright, for she hates cruelty, and thinks of these trifles too deeply. It will be easy enough to frame a story, but we must keep the truth out of sight.”

“Of course,” said de Sevigné, “do you suppose one would tell her the real facts—they certainly would not speak in his favour with her sensibility. At court it is of little consequence. His case is going hard with those bigots of Rennes, and a deputation is to be sent almost immediately to the king. His mother behaves very ill in the affair, she will not interfere, and declares that the law shall take its course. We must manage to introduce him well, and gain him a firm footing before the old idiots arrive, for if some caprice of justice should take Louis, he might doom him to death at once, and confirm the expected sentence of the judges.”

At this moment the friends reached the door of Lomaria's hotel, and the hero of the hour was conducted by them in triumph to the shrine of the divinity of Paris.

The sensation which he created was even greater than had been anticipated. Ninon was enchanted with his grace, ease, and talent, ap-

parently universal knowledge, his refined taste in literature, his voice, and his dancing.

“You were so young,” said she, “when we met before that I had more than half forgotten you—but years have made you all I then foretold. Madame Scarron, whose position as you know is strangely altered since then, predicted that you would one day outshine all our men of fashion. You have, of course, seen your old friend?”

Lomaria informed her that he had done so, and been received in the kindest manner.

“Oh yes,” said Ninon, “that is the best trait in her character—she never ill-treats an old acquaintance—if there is policy in it, it is at least good. Even I, if I choose it, might always be her guest, but I wish to shock no one’s prejudices, and my world I can create as I please, after my own fantasy.”

“What can we do for this meteor of beauty?” said the fair syren to de Seigné,
“can we not marry him to some great heiress

and secure his fortune—for though not poor, Pomenars tells me he has already spent a great part of his possessions and must repair it.”

“ Pomenars had better give him a fortune *in his own coin*,” remarked Langlée, “ you know how he got off in the late business ?”

“ No,” said Ninon, “ I have not had time to ask—but I see him here, therefore his sentence was, probably, not very severe.”

“ It could not be positively proved that he had issued false coin,” proceeded Langlée, “ and he was acquitted—he paid the fees of his trial honourably in the same bright suspected pieces, and has now shaved his beard, as you see, for, as he justly said, during the trial, what was the use of his attending to his head till he knew to whom it belonged, whether to the king or himself.”

Ninon laughed heartily at this anecdote. “ But tell me,” said she, “ could we not contrive to marry this Breton Phoenix, Lomaria, to Mademoiselle de Meri, the richest heiress at

court. She would have an inimitable husband, and he would be a made man.

"Why not!" cried de Grammont, "the thought is exquisite. She is made of money—she rolls in diamonds and gold, and has no idea how to spend her riches. Fate is against me, or I would teach her—my star is contrary to marriage; but Lomaria is the man, we will arrange it all for him. I do not mind trouble for a friend."

"Generous creature!" said Ninon, "you are always ready to make up all matches but your own. It is, however, more generous in me; for I lose my lovers by this means. You arranged that affair of the handsome Felix de Varennes between you and de Seigné. Pray tell me how it has turned out—I mean his marriage with the Countess of Mezeraye?"

"Ask de Seigné, he is his correspondent," replied de Grammont; "but we will not wander from our subject: let us think of the best

GABRIELLE ; OR,

is of securing the heiress for our **Breton**
id."

But let me know," said Lomaria approach-
—for he had heard the conversation, "some-
ing of the lady. If Mademoiselle de l'Enclos
as not seen her I will not give ear to **the**
subject. If she has, her word is my law—I
will marry her immediately."

"I have seen her," said Ninon smiling, "and
will describe her to you. She is just one and
twenty—tall, graceful, with the softest blue
eyes in the world, a faultless complexion, and
perfect manners. Her disposition is said to be
sweetness itself and her name of Angelique
expresses what she is. She is quite independent,
and her wealth knows no bounds: in fact she
is the great match of the day. Ah! Lomaria,
you have only to present yourself and she is
yours."

"One thing you do not know," said Langlée,
she is prejudiced against our accomplished friend,
and resolves to avoid him."

"A circumstance in his favour," returned Ninon; "she will find herself irresistibly drawn towards him, and the less able to escape."

"Lomaria will go with us to the masked ball, at Chantilly," said de Grammont—"his dress is unique, and will captivate all Paris. She need not know who the hero is who has enchained her till the bait is taken. This business is well begun, and we are all embarked in the cause—it shall not fail. We will have another wedding as gay as that of Mademoiselle de Blois."

"How goes on the wooing, my dear de Grammont?" said Ninon, "it is one of the most comic things of the day, this pretty little marriage ceremony. The king has a set of play things quite to his mind."

"Oh," replied de Grammont, "this couple are more in love than was ever known out of arcadia. The king said to his daughter the other day that he loved her so much he could not bear to part with her. The pretty

bride elect was so pleased and so much affected that she burst into tears, upon which her father exclaimed, "Ah! I see how it is—you have a secret aversion for the husband we have chosen for you." This redoubled her tears, the Prince de Conti hurried to console her, and nearly overturned half a dozen ladies of honour, in his haste to catch her before she fainted. He threw himself at her feet before all the court, mingled his tears with hers, and had to be caressed and comforted by the tyrant father in most heroic style. I added to the risibility of the scene, by gravely recommending the prince, to be careful, and humour his future father-in-law, take all things easy with him, and I did not doubt but he would find he had married into a very good family. The king on this laughed heartily, and the tragedy became a farce forthwith."

"The fair penitent, meanwhile," said de Seigné, "is in high spirits—the Prince has been to the Carmelites to visit her, and my mother assures me that the scene was quite

edifying. Sister Louise is almost as lovely as ever, with the same seraphic eyes which no fasting nor austerities can render dim, but for the new divinity her royal lover would be again in danger; but he is chained to the car of this goddess with links of diamond, and will more than ever need the prayers of all the pious sisterhood, with the pious *adviser* at the head of all."

"What, Madame Scarron, you mean?" said Pomenars, "the widow is playing a singular game—she most assuredly has the king in her power, yet she gives him leave to hop from her hand to any distance he pleases, taking care that he gets not too far for her to pluck him back when it suits her purpose."

"But how does the wise Madame (no longer *de Maintenon*) bear the new reign?" asked Ninon of her gay friends. "The pretty Duchess is, methinks, more dangerous than the passionate Marquise; religion, doubtless, consoles her for all."

"Oh yes," said de Grammont, "and it will

come more into fashion than ever, for there are now so many hearts to be consoled. She bears all with philosophy and fortitude, and her patience comes out in great relief against the gloomy sky of de Montespan's rage. Meantime the lovely idol lives in an atmosphere of splendour, never yet imagined. The presents she has made this new year are the most costly ever heard of; diamonds and pearls are to her but blossoms and leaves, which she scatters around with the hand of a goddess of flowers. Louis denies her nothing, and it is thought soon he will build her a palace entirely of gold, with every brick studded with jewels."

"Poor Montespan!" said Ninon, "she must be ready to die of vexation. What weakness! as if love was not made of gossamer, which every breeze carries off to the next flower, only to be whirled away again with the slightest breath."

"Madame Scarron's sensibilities are not so readily called forth," said de Sevigné; "reason

is her guide in everything, and prudence with her tempers affection."

"She never felt affection for a created creature!" exclaimed Ninon, "except herself—that woman has but one idol, to whom she offers up every victim friend she seduces into her toils. Her aims are ambitious, and she will succeed in whatever she undertakes. She resolved to be the wife of Scarron, and she succeeded. She is bent on a higher match now, and you will see in time the triumph of hypocrisy in her."

"Do you really think the king loves such a woman?" said de Seigné.

"She will become necessary to him," replied Ninon, "and that is the secret of most unions. She will give him a habit of consulting her, of finding sympathy in her, and it will end by his flying to her on all occasions, till, at last, as he grows older, he will not seek to find in mere beauty, what her superior mind can afford him, amusement and variety."

"She is an accomplished hypocrite," said de Grammont.

"All see through her mask, but none will ever be able to lift it," returned Ninon.

"Lomaria," said she, suddenly changing the subject, "have you become inoculated with this mania which has taken possession of us all in Paris—have you been yet to visit Les Amis?"

"Alas!" said Lomaria, "I am a stranger, ignorant of all that is worthy to be known. How should a wild Breton like me know how to comport himself without the help of a fairy, whose wand can lead him into the right way? I never heard of Les Amis."

"It is time that you should," returned she laughing, "fear not, you have friends who are ever ready to assist your ignorance. You must know then that we are all bent on discovering our destinies, and in order to do so we go in crowds day after day to a certain abode of sybils where an oracle declares all that envious

time would conceal from our view. In other words some strange people, not long arrived in Paris from the East, as it is said, have the power of telling fortunes in a manner so surprising that inspiration of some sort must assist them. They know the past and predict the future. You must consult them, and they shall tell whether your star is propitious at this moment."

"I can myself decide that question," replied Lomaria, gallantly bowing to Ninon, "it is at the height for I have been presented to a divinity."

"Are you as superstitious in Brittany as we in Paris?" said Ninon, "I have heard that you have wild tales in your shadowy land."

"We are a people given up to sorcerers and witches—we see a fairy in every glade—a nymph in every fountain," answered Lomaria, "but I never felt that I had become the victim of spells and enchantments till I came to the capital."

Ninon smiled with gratified vanity as the

handsome Breton uttered compliments, which in his mouth had a value they wanted when uttered by another.

"You shall tell us some of your witch stories," said she, "for you, I am sure, can give the horrible a grace," then turning to the rest she exclaimed:

"Who has heard the new Opera of Proserpine? nothing like it was ever imagined—you must all go to-night—my box will expand to hold you—let us, cavaliers, give up our souls to the delights of music, and forget all the discords of the common world."

So saying she rang for her carriage, and a chosen few were selected by her to be honored with a seat in it, while the others dispersed with a promise of joining her in the course of the evening, a promise which was one of the few, always performed, as to be banished from the circle of Ninon, or absent at any time, having once been admitted to it, was to lose all claims to be considered of the *grande mode*.

Lomaria was not only the chosen cavalier on the occasion, but Ninon, proud to display her new conquest in the eyes of the ladies of the court, contrived in a thousand ways to make him conspicuous; she was happy to observe that he attracted universal attention, and that all eyes were turned to her part of the theatre.

That night he first saw Angelique de Meri, whom Ninon pointed out to him as she sat near the queen; her appearance pleased him more than he chose to acknowledge to the fair coquette whom he wished at the moment to propitiate.

"She is pretty enough," said he to de Grammont on their way home, "to give me some glory in gaining her—her fortune will be of infinite service to me at this period; and she does not look too robust to tire me out when it is more convenient that I should be a widower. I think I can manage the affair without Les Amis."

De Grammont listened to his new friend, with surprise.

"One would think you were born at Court, Lomaria," said he, "your ideas are so ready, your conclusions so just, and you have so little conscience. The pretty de Meri will be a lucky woman."

CHAPTER III.

LOMARIA.

"Je suis assurée que vous auriez été ravie de voir danser Lomaria : les violons et passe-pieds de la cour font mal au cœur aux pris de ceux là : c'est quelque chose d'extraordinaire : je n'ai jamais vu d'homme danser comme Lomaria.

"Je voudrais que vous eussiez vu l'air de M. de Lomaria, et de qu'elle manière il ôte et remet son chapeau : qu'elle legereté ! qu'elle justesse ! Il peut defier tous les courtisans et les confondre, sur ma parole."

LETTERS OF MADAME DE SEVIGNE.

"Did ever Dragon so become a cave!"

SHAKSPERE.

THE hero whose accomplishments and singular beauty, grace, and talent, had roused so much interest in so many bosoms, and who had now

gained a stable footing in the fashionable world, the last touch required to render him irresistible, who had awakened something almost akin to affection in the heart of the Goddess of the Mode, the inimitable Ninon, who had attracted the attention of the king, and set all the gossips of Paris at work, was by birth a Breton. He was called generally Lomaria, from one of his estates, but his title was that of Marquis de Gwerrand, and was the son of parents whose virtues were so distinguished that their names were never pronounced in Brittany without blessings. They had no other son, and when a child he gave every promise of equalling them in excellent qualities, at least this was the impression made on the minds of all who beheld him, and who, like the generality of mankind, judged from appearances, for nothing could exceed the beauty of his face and form. It seemed as if the minds of his parents were pictured forth in the body of this angelic infant. He became the

wonder and admiration of the whole country, and, as may be imagined, was the idol of his father and mother. Whether their excessive indulgence, and unwearied tenderness were the cause of their treasure's destruction it is hard to pronounce, but certain it is that with the growth of every year, as the child's beauty increased the worst propensities developed themselves, until his parents could no longer conceal from themselves the vices of their darling.

His education was most carefully attended to; the Marquis removed to his hotel in Paris in order that his son might have the benefit of every advantage; his capacity was great, his talents various, his facility extraordinary; although he had an invincible dislike to study, and would only learn what gave him least trouble. In all the accomplishments of the day he was a proficient, and his quickness and readiness prevented his ever appearing at a loss on any subject. After a few years the Marquis

returned to his estates in Brittany, where he was anxious that his son should reside, and adopt the patriarchal mode of life which had so endeared him to his vassals. Young Lomaria found, at first, much amusement in the country sports, in which he excelled; and the deference and homage paid him reconciled him to the routine of a country life. He soon found, however, amusements less innocent, which drew down upon him from the pure and simple people amongst whom he lived, and whose usages he outraged, reprobation and dislike. His example corrupted many of the young men in his neighbourhood whose manners were hitherto, though homely, without blame, and his name became a terror to parents and a knell to all.

The death of his father left Lomaria, at an early age, his own master, and the arbiter of his own destiny: his mother, whose fondness for him nothing could diminish, saw with agony that, as his power to do evil increased, his

will became greater to take advantage of it; and her whole life was spent in endeavours to counteract the harm he was continually doing. Much as she adored him his presence was therefore a continual pain to her; and during his absences, which were frequent, she existed in the hope that he would not be committing any fault which would make him more hated in his own country.

Extravagant beyond bounds, her utmost care was necessarily exerted to prevent his profusion being felt by those who depended on the protection of the castle, and all her own property was spent in charities which her unworthy son knew and cared little about. All luxury and enjoyment she denied to herself, in order that no difference might be felt by those around her; and while Lomaria carried on his career of wickedness, his exemplary, but too attached mother, was a prey to every species of anxiety and privation.

Lomaria, at the time when he first appeared

in Paris, was in the very zenith of his beauty ; and the bad reputation which he had gained in Brittany was rather in his favour than otherwise in the dissolute society of which he was in future to be the distinguished star.

The broken hearts and lacerated feelings he had left behind weighed not upon his conscience, and he gave himself up without reserve to the enjoyment of every dissipation provided by the most brilliant and vicious court in Europe.

Of all those whose beauty and riches might attract the young Breton, perhaps few were more calculated for his purpose than the heiress Angelique de Meri. Left an orphan at an early age, she had been brought up in a convent in Auvergne, where her estates lay, and had only appeared a short time in the world attached to the service, and under the protection of the amiable queen of Louis XIV.

Notwithstanding her inexperience she had decided notions and a firm will: unable to

comprehend the manners of the gay world in which she now moved, everything appeared to her inexplicable and unreasonable, and she looked with aversion on every one of the gay gallants who fluttered about her, never seeking to discover if any worth existed beneath the frivolous exterior of those who were the idols of the day. In general she was right, for there were very few amongst those who surrounded her whose claim to attention extended beyond the fashion of their garments.

When she first met Lomaria, at a masked ball, at the palace of the Prince de Condé, at Chantilly, it was in a blaze of splendour hitherto unknown, even in that expensive region. Before she was aware of the name of the elegant and fascinating cavalier who attached himself to her side during the evening, and appeared to be exclusively occupied with her, she already felt his influence, and the gentleness and softness of his manners, joined

to a certain melancholy in his voice, interested her deeply.

When she was formally introduced to him by the Prince, the sound of his name startled her, and recollections of certain rumours which had reached her ear when she first heard of him, returned with such sudden force that she could not conceal a shudder, as she drew back her hand from his respectful salute. Her action was not unobserved by him, and as he made his bow and retired there was a mournful reproach in his eyes, as a low, tremulous sigh escaped him, which was not without its effect.

"Did you not tell me, madam," said she to the queen, "that the Countess de Giverrand was a most amiable woman?"

"Certainly," replied the queen, "she is a pattern to her sex, and her late husband was one of the best of men."

"Is it then likely that their son should deserve the character I have heard of him?" said Angelique, with a slight hesitation.

"I fear he is very unlike either of his parents," answered Marie Thésèse, "and the example he will have here will not improve him. He is the last man I should desire you to look upon with an eye of favour. I see he admires you, which is but natural, and he is so insinuating that I warn you in time not to allow yourself to regard him with any but hostile feelings."

"He is, of course, indifferent to me," said Angelique, "but his sentiments and manners are strangely different from all others with whom I have conversed since I came to Paris. It is singular indeed if he deserve all that is said of him."

Every time that circumstances threw Angelique into the society of Lomaria, and the occasion was frequent, she became more and more convinced in her own mind that he had been misrepresented: the delicacy of his mind, the purity of his feelings expressed in every word he uttered, the subdued admiration

shown in his looks, the almost chivalrous respect which he paid her, all tended to impress her with a belief that envy of his merits had caused him to be maligned.

One evening they were conversing together at an assembly, where, in the midst of a crowd, they appeared alone, Angelique ventured to lead to the subject of Brittany, about whose history she made many enquiries. His answers delighted her, the romance and mystery attached to that singular region excited her curiosity, and the enthusiasm with which he spoke of his country inspired her with admiration as well as surprise.

“ And are you really attached to this solitary and remarkable spot ? ” asked she, somewhat doubtingly.

Lomaria hesitated. “ May I really venture,” he said, “ to tell you the truth. To few besides should I dare to express all the adoration I have for this wild land of my birth. In Paris, to feel any enthusiasm except for the

reigning trifles of the day is ridiculous, and I fear if I told you my weakness, I should be condemned as savage."

"Not by me," said Angelique. "Have you not observed with how much contempt I treat these trifles to which you attach importance. Do you suppose that I imagine there is no world but the illuminated and unnatural atmosphere around us."

"I did you injustice," replied Lomaria, "but to none of the brilliant companions of the court would I breathe my sentiments. To none would I tell of the deep devotion I feel for every wild dell, every weird stone, every desert waste of my own neglected land, where, beneath a rugged outside, beat hearts filled with every virtue that adorns humanity. Blest should I be to live in those wilds a life of simple happiness far from these empty gaities which only leave the mind a void, and cannot satisfy the affections."

"Why, feeling as you do, did you ever leave them?" asked Angelique.

" We are the creatures of circumstance," said Lomaria, " it was expected of me that I should appear for a time in the world, and I obey, but how sweet will be my return to that dear castle where my mother dwells, to that rural hamlet where I have a friend in every villager to—"

" The *Aire Neuve* !" said a low, deep voice, close to the ear of Lomaria.

Lomaria started, his face became of ashy paleness as he laid his hand upon his sword. There was no one near them, yet the voice was clear and distinct, and seemed to have proceeded from some person close beside them.

" Who was that who spoke?" said he to Mademoiselle de Meri, but she only gazed on him with surprise, not having apparently heard the voice. The colour returned to his cheek, and he recovered himself. " Some passing remark probably, which the wind wafted towards us from the open windows of this beautiful pavilion, whose garden invites the admirer of nature in its highest adornment to

linger. To me how much more admirable is the wild sea, the rugged rocks, the frowning forests of my poor country, doomed, like worth in unseemly raiment, to be despised."

"You speak sadly of your country," said Angelique. "Is it then so neglected?"

"By the great it is," replied Lomaria; "our men of rank, who derive their revenues from its soil, spend all in this gay court, and care little for their honest tenantry whose hearts are more worth gaining than their gold. My father lived amongst his people, and such is my intention, in due time." As he said this Lomaria sighed, and cast down his eyes. "My mother," he continued, "wishes me to marry, and should I ever do so, I should hope to live and die amongst my people like a patriarch, beloved and honoured as my father was. But how shall I ever find amongst the gay and lovely, one who would bury herself with a hermit like me?"

"They tell me," said Angelique, blushing

and thinking to change the subject, "that you have antique songs and legends belonging to your singular country of strange interest, unlike those of any other nation, and worthy to delight the ears of those whom the world calls polished."

"Would you like to hear one?" said Lomaria with readiness.

Before she could reply they were joined by Madame de Maintenon, who taking a seat by the young heiress joined her entreaties to her's that Lomaria would give them a specimen of the metrical lore of Brittany, in which he was said to be well versed.

"You must forgive the monotony of the air which accompanies most of these ballads," said he, pleased to have attracted the attention he coveted, "in my country these pieces are generally chaunted by one of our bards to the listening peasants who crowd on summer evenings round him as he sits beneath some aged tree, and drones forth some such ditty as this.

I learnt it of a bard named Salatin, who is a famous poet amongst our rude people."

Lomaria then in a rich, deep, expressive voice rather chaunted than sung a legend popular in Brittany, having preluded it by describing the scene where the story he was about to relate had taken place.

"Two leagues from the pretty little town of Kemperlé," said he, "which seems to float on the waters of the Isol and the Ellé, like a wreath of flowers and leaves upon a lake, is seen towards the north the large village of Faouet. The ancient chiefs of this name held a conspicuous place in the history of Bretagne, and their adventures form the subject of many popular ballads. This is one, and there exist several others on the same theme.

THE CRUSADER'S SPOUSE.

Dialect of Cornouaille.

" Whilst I seek the Holy War
Where shall I my lady leave ?
Who will guard her-- I afar,
Who will bid her cease to grieve !"

" Give thy gentle dame to me,
Brother, well my zeal is known,
She shall with my daughters be,
And be tended like my own.
With my children let her stay,
Or with noble ladies fair,
All shall tend her day by day,
And the same repast prepare."

Gay at Faouet it seems,
Horses neigh and armour gleams,
Full of nobles is the Court,
Eager there they make resort,
Each a red cross large and wide
On his shoulder bears with pride :
Each his banner in his hand,
Warriors for the Holy Land.

And the Lord of Faouet
Went with them upon that day.
But his tow'rs he left not long,
Ere with woe his lady wept,
Her his brother sought to wrong,
And a wretched captive kept.

" If my love you thus repay,
Quit your crimson robes I pray,
Linen gowns you well may wear
For my herds shall be your care."

" Oh, good brother, say not so—
How to tend them should I know?"

" If you know not, as a boon,
This long lance shall teach you soon!"

Seven long years that lady wept,
Seven long years his flocks she kept :
When that weary time was past,
She could smile and sing at last.
Oft she sung, nor would repine,
When a knight from Palestine,
Home returning on his way,
On the mountain heard her lay.

" Halt, my page," and rest thee here,
Hold my bridle and be still,
For a silver voice I hear,
Wake the echoes of the hill;
And that little voice I know,
Sweet as seven long years ago!"

" Hail ! young mountain maiden fair,
Your repast must good have been,
For you sing so debonair,
And you seem of joy the queen."

" Yes, sir knight, my crust, tho' dry,
All my wants can well supply."

" Tell me, beauteous shepherd maid,
Can I in yon castle stay?"

" Yes, sir knight, for you display'd :
Will be cheer both rich and gay :
Stable for your gallant steed
And a soft bed at your need :
Once I had such merry cheer,
But my husband then was near !
Then I slept not in a shed ;
Nor amongst the dogs was fed !"

" On thy hand a ring I see---
Where, then, is thy husband gone?"

" Ah, my husband, woe is me !
Went to war and left me lone :
Beauteous did his bright locks shine,
Locks as fair, young knight, as thine !"

" If his locks like mine were bright,
Turn thee, fair one, look again,
Am not I thy own true knight
Come to end thy care and pain !"

" Heard I right, oh, blissful day !
I am she, thy love, thy wife,
Lady once of Faouet,
Thine alone, in death or life."

" Leave these fields, my love, and come,
For 'tis meet we seek our home.
I would fain be there to-day,
All too long I've been away.

* * *

Hail, good brother, hail to all,
Tidings of my lady tell
Whom I left within my hall,
In thy keeping, fair and well."

"Blest be thou, escaped all ill !
She is well and lovely still.
Welcome, welcome, brother dear,
Seat thee and partake our cheer.
She is gone to Kemperlé,
For a fête is there to-day,
She with other dames is gone,
But she will return anon—
Oh what joy her lord to see,
And what happiness for thee !"

"Liar, slave—who cast her forth
Drove her hence thy flocks to feed,
Fly, avoid a husband's wrath,
Shame upon so vile a deed,
Hear'st thou not her sobs, and cries,
Lo ! she stands before thine eyes.

Hence, away and hide thy shame
Recreant to thy fathers name !
For thy crime throughout the land
Infamy thy race shall brand ;
In these halls, unknown to wrong,
Dwelt my sire and mother long,
Or this sword a vengeance meet ;
Straight had slain thee at her feet !"

A crowd of gay gallants at this moment approaching, put an end to the scene, and the *hermit-bard* was carried off to exhibit his inimitable skill in the *passe-pieds*, which he had introduced to the Parisian world of fashion, and to witness which was the great object of all the splendid throng which filled the saloons of royalty.

Such interviews, such conversations as this frequently recurred, and by degrees Angelique accustomed herself to expect the devotion which was so readily accorded to her, and to feel disappointed if circumstances prevented her receiving it.

CHAPTER IV.

LES COMPAGNONS DU DEVOIR.

"Le bois le plus funeste et le moins fréquenté
Est, au prix de Paris, un lieu de sûreté."

BOILEAU.

A strange contrast to the elegant and refined society of Paris was to be found in the secret recesses of its crowded city.

In an obscure quarter, long known as the haunt of the most degraded characters, coiners, thieves, and murderers, existed the Rue de Champ Fleury, whose dark, dirty, and narrow

precincts served well to conceal the deeds perpetrated in its retreat and to shelter the actors in them.

Here, in a low, gloomy chamber, accessible by several secret ways, were assembled a party of persons of both sexes, whose business seemed of a nature that shunned the light of day. Two women appeared to take the lead in the conversation, and they both asked and answered questions of their companions with great earnestness.

From a specimen of their conversation their quality may be guessed at, but it may be as well to mention that they formed part of a secret, and widely extended community called "Compagnons du-devoir," whose mysteries had existed in the heart of the capital for many years, and in spite of the late vigilance of the police authorities, had never been destroyed, although they had found it requisite to carry on their plans with greater caution than in the preceding reign.

The society was formed of a great variety of personages, whose sole aim, by whatever means, was to obtain money. It was well known that several influential persons of rank, both male and female, were enrolled in the fraternity, and at a time when gambling and extravagance of all kinds was carried on to an incredible point, those who were deeply engaged in such pursuits hesitated not to seek any opportunity of gratifying their propensities.

The chief of those who were now met in the Rue Champ Fleury, were the famous Catherine Deshaies, who had gained a great name as *La Voisin*, at the time now spoken of. She was resorted to by weak persons, who consulted her as it was called, respecting "*curiosités*," namely a knowledge of the future, and discovery of hidden things. Her associate, the as notorious Madame de Rouville, a woman known as Vigoureux, together with the reputed sorceress Nicolas Hocque, Petit Pierre, Etienne Jardin,

Jean Biaule, and the noted brigand Louis Coarnon, called Bras d' Acier.

The last personage addressing one of the women thus spoke.

" So the game goes on well, Catherine ; you find dupes enough amongst these Gentile fools."

" Never better, Coarnon," answered Catherine, " I am now quite the fashion at Court, and my rooms are actually besieged with the silly women who seek to know their fate. But our star rises higher and higher, for the king's mistresses one and all have visited me, and the weight of this purse will, methinks, add considerably to our common stock." As she spoke she threw down on the floor a quantity of gold pieces, which were eagerly scrambled for by the party amidst vociferous exclamations.

" You said *all* the king's mistresses," said de Rouville ; " surely not the saintly Scarron ?"

" She!" exclaimed la Voisin contemptuously, " oh, she is an old customer. I predicted to her long ago, when she was the old poet's wife,

that a higher lot was hers. It was easy enough to foretell that. She is worthy to be one of us, if cunning and talent would admit her to our community. I told her she would be a Duchess and have ventured even as far as to say, Queen. She is ready to believe it; and what do I lose by the promise at any rate.

• But the pretty idiot de Scoraille has been to me only to-day."

"Indeed!" cried several voices; "and what have you told the weak puppet?"

"The same things as the wise one—but not the truth, which remains behind. I did not tell her that before a twelvemonth she would be food for worms," said La Voisin.

"Am I to be called on then?" said the brigand, Bras d'Acier, laughing, "or have you a more delicate death for so dainty a fair one than I should indulge in?"

"She will be poisoned slowly—I have promised that to de Montespan, who came to me in a fury which knew no bounds. Had you

seen how she stormed and raved, and uttered imprecations against her rival and the king, it would have rejoiced your heart. I let her fury have its vent—she gave me all this gold as earnest, and is to supply any demand I may choose to make as the work advances. The first dose is already given, and a good foundation is laid—she is young and strong, but the longer she lingers the more we gain from her enemy, and at her death she doubles all we have received.”

“Glorious news !” exclaimed the party, “this is the best scheme we have had on foot for years—that is,” added de Rouville, “since the death of our old friend Brinvilliers—she was a great genius.”

“And pray, madam,” exclaimed in an angry tone la Voisin, “in what do I fall short of her—can I not name as many who have been sacrificed to the good cause of universal friendship which we possess—have I not offered as many victims to our faith, and is not my art even greater than her own?”

“ True, true,” cried de Rouville, “ I do not dispute it—but how can we refuse a tribute of regret to the memory one so valuable! we honor the living, but we mourn the dead. I have myself done our cause no little service, and my foster son the Marquis, will I think mainly help us.”

“ Yes,” returned La Voisin, “ he is indeed an acquisition. How came you to have such influence with him?”

“ The fact is,” said de Rouville, “ soon after the mother of young Lomaria married, I was engaged as her maid, and lived with her some years in high favour, for the simple Breton fools never found out that it was I who contrived to rob them continually, as I made it a point, of course, of doing. I always arranged so that the blame should fall on others, and so gained their confidence, that by degrees I got entirely the upper hand in the family. The young heir was my charge, and as I found him full of talent and cunning, it was a real amuse-

ment to me in that dull retirement to teach him the arts which I had so long neglected. I do assure you there is not a more accomplished thief in our community than Lomaria: his lightness of finger is equal to his lightness of foot. As for the cards, before he was ten years old I taught him every trick I knew, and his genius was so astonishing that he suggested new methods of deceiving which I had never thought of. It was about this time that an accident revealed to Madame de Nevers, the style of education I was giving her son. Her consternation was extreme, and I was obliged to go through a scene of apparent penitence, which cost me much vexation. She consented not to expose me, and I was returned to Paris. Her refusal, however, to recommend me placed me in great difficulties, for which I was resolved to repay her, and it was not long before I had a good opportunity; for while Lomaria was in Paris for his studies I managed to see him, and from that time we have not lost sight

of each other. He is a pupil worth having, a glorious genius! he has spent more money than any two in Paris, but always gets more by some clever stratagem, and has such power of oratory and persuasion, that when he is at the worst he can deceive his mother so well that almost every year she believes his reform has begun, though he goes through the same farce over and over again. Young de Seigné and he are worthy companions, and as we have their countenance, we need not be afraid of old la Reinie himself, and all his police. Every day more dupes arrive: I do not reject them of any class, nor do I turn away money in any shape. I will tell you an excellent jest which happened the other day. A foolish woman had lost her only son—probably Bras d'Acier you could tell *how*—she came to me to know where he was, or how she could find his body. I told her to put a candle into a wooden bowl, and let it float down the Seine, when it would

stop at the place where he had been murdered, and his corpse thrown into the water.

The idiot did as I ordered, set her candle afloat, watched it from the banks ; on it went, whirling away till suddenly it came in contact with a barge laden with hay ; in an instant the huge pile caught fire—blazed like a volcano—threw its burning heaps in the air, which communicated the flames to a shed in a boat, and behold a glorious conflagration : the banks of the river lined with gaping fools—the police out—the credulous mother seized as an incendiary, and thrown into prison—destruction and confusion at its height, and I, from my windows on the quay, enjoying the scene.

“ I was there,” said Bras d’Acier, “ and several of my friends, and thought I recognised your hand in the affair. We made a good deal in the confusion, snuff boxes and watches fell in by dozens, and on the whole the plan answered perfectly.

The Cour des Miracles were out, and helped

considerably, for they have some clever men amongst them. Well, it must be confessed that Paris is the very Paradise of pickpockets. I conceive that we are unrivalled in that art, and trust, with management, that we shall be as skilful in the quiet removal of obnoxious persons. No enquiries, you see, have been made, and it is marvellous how many husbands and fathers have died during the last year. This is rather out of my way; for I think the good old method of the dagger just as effective, if properly conducted."

"It may be so," said La Voisin, "but all have not your skill, Bras d'Acier, and this secret plan is more secure. Yes, you say right, Paris is a fine theatre. A man may always live for six months in style, without being found out, and he has only to change his name and his quarter, and no one will recognise him, so that a life may be passed merrily, sometimes as a prince, sometimes as a beggar. But

how have you fared lately, La Hocque, as a sorcerer?"

"I have not been idle, I assure you," said Nicolas Hocque, "these stupid Parisians, who are not content with seeing the devil in a common way, have flocked to my cavern, near Gentilly, where I make them pay pretty freely for a sight which scares them out of the little wit they have. I can scarce contain myself at their folly while I play the farce out. You know what good use I have put the old quarry to—its allées branch out in many ways, and meet in a centre, which furthers my purpose admirably. I carry my curious visitors there, taking care, first, that they pay me at least forty-five or fifty pistoles; I then make them take a solemn oath of secrecy, exact a promise that they will show no terror, nor call upon any sacred name; I then enter a cell of the cavern, first go through a set of invocations, and use as many hard words as I can muster. Presently, in the depths of the recesses, is heard a noise

of chains and the growling of a mastiff, which they take for a demon. I then demand if they are terrified—by this time they are generally half dead with fear, and as often as not they entreat to be let out. I get rid of them as quickly as I can, and having their money in my pocket, am content. If, however, they have as much nerve as folly I go on with the scene, and advancing to the mouth of a gulf, I utter some frightful words, calling on the fiends. I then fall into convulsions, and roll in agonies. Six of my men, who are ready for the occasion, then rush out, throwing about flames of phosphorus, and dancing wildly. Of course they are dressed in as hideous a manner as we can devise. Amidst the flames which are now bright and now extinct, I then show them a great black goat, covered with chains painted red, which seem all on fire. On the right and left of the goat are placed two enormous mastiffs, whose heads being confined in wooden tubes, large at one end and small at the other,

utter long and horrible howlings, when goaded by the apparent demons, and so loud and fearful is the echo, through the extensive caverns, that actually my own hair bristles with fright, and my visitors sometimes fall into fits on the spot. The goat meantime rushes about, aiming at every one with his fiery horns, and is only kept back by my six demons, who roar and shriek and dance shaking their chains, and waving their black arms and hands, garnished with immense claws. If my guests are not overcome with this, and desire to see more, which is occasionally the case, I give a signal, after some mummary, and two of my fiends dart forth with long bags filled with sand, which they dash in all directions. I exclaim that I can no longer restrain their fury; and while I drag my friend towards the mouth of the cavern they set upon him beating him unmercifully with their sacks and using the most horrible language. By dint of roaring, exostulation, and force, I pretend to rescue their

victim: they retire howling back to darkness and I bring my dupe, more dead than alive, to the upper air, strongly recommending him never to try to see the devil again. I always find that my advice is taken; for after the comfortable drubbing he has got and the terror he has experienced, none ever return to the scene of action."

The mirth occasioned by these anecdotes was put a stop to by the sudden arrival, at this juncture, of a new guest, whose signal was recognised with much pleasure by the assembled group. One of the low doors which communicated with one of the private passages of this mysterious abode, was cautiously opened, and a tall figure appeared, muffled in a priest's habit.

He was hailed by all with a deferential air.

"Welcome, my dear Le Sage," said La Voisin, caressing him, though he drew back coldly from her embrace, "we only wanted you and our council is complete. What news do you bring us?"

"I have just procured you a supply of gold," answered he whom they called Le Sage, "in my character of confessor, and with my credentials from my friends the Jesuits, I succeed admirably. We are unsuspected, and have only to continue our cautions and prosper. I have seen," he continued, throwing himself into a seat. "I have seen Monsieur de Luxembourg, who has liberally contributed to the cause. The Countess de Soissons is ours, Madame d'Alluye is ready to join us, and Madame de Polignac is satisfied with your zeal. All send by me, your treasurer, the promised rewards, and urge you to fresh exertions. The Princess de Tingri, and the Duchess de Foix, will shortly come here to visit La Voisin. Depend on it there will not be a single person who has wrongs to redress, who will not join our fraternity. We are the great reformers of the age—we are the righters of grievances—we are the only true, honest citizens and regenerators of France."

"This is well," said La Voisin in a tone of exultation: "we prosper from day to day, and are growing too strong to fear the law. But why should we live longer in holes and corners—why not come forth and enjoy our good fortune like the princes of the earth, and join the great society who have sought and cannot now refuse us."

A shout answered to this proposition, great clamour arose, and every voice strove for mastery. The new comer, with an authoritative air, silenced the tumult, and thus spoke:—

"You are right, my friends, genius like yours should not be condemned to concealment: but we must be cautious, and make our arrangements according to the several capacities of those concerned. You ladies," he continued, addressing la Voisin and de Rouville, "fascinating as you are, will be well able to sustain the parts of persons of quality. You shall have a handsome hotel, and receive the best company at your brilliant parties. You,

Vigoureux," he added, addressing a swarthy but handsome woman, "shall occupy the post of *dame de charge* in the establishment. You, gentlemen, can name the different employments which please you; but remember I consider it more prudent that you do not separate. And as each of you, in your time, has occupied some capacity of trust, no doubt you will each be able to adopt a character in the household of Madame la Voisin, most suitable to your genius."

"For my part," said Bras d'Acier, "I can do more good at large, and those of my band, who are most accustomed to their liberty can follow me. We will of course, when we make part of the society of the hotel la Voisin, appear with suitable splendour, and shall require enough to furnish us well forth."

"Certainly," said their director, gravely. "I shall expect to see you and your friends handsomely accoutred at our first grand fête to which I invite you all this day week. I leave

all adornments to the ladies, the company we are sure of—all the gallants of Paris are ready to patronise us, and we will make an era in the gay city. I have many schemes on foot which I shall develop by degrees, and I doubt not that we shall have a brilliant reign, which shall eclipse all that went before, though it were that of Le Grand Monarque himself.”

“A new triumph is opening upon us, I trust,” said La Voisin, “and we shall succeed as well now as fifty years since, when our fraternity were held in the esteem we deserved: the minds of people require enlightenment, and who can guide them so well as we? We are well acquainted with all the resources of humanity, we know the secret springs of human action. We know that gold is the great idol, and the only divinity, and we put people in the way of obtaining it. Believe me, my friends, there is nothing else worth living for—there is, in fact, no other aim or end for which people do live, and let their pretence be what

it may, it resolves itself to that. Who shall say we are not great artists—who shall say we are less than potentates? The good father will provide us a suitable theatre, and we will not shame his introduction to the first society in Paris. Let us begin by giving a grand entertainment, on a novel plan. Everyone shall come masked. It shall be given out that de Rouville, and I, who will assume names, are heiresses, sisters—the daughters of a rich Polish merchant, lately dead.”

“Excellent,” said de Rouville, “anything out of the common in our establishment will pass for foreign, and we need be under no apprehension of detection.”

“Detection!” said Le Sage contemptuously, “there are too many great personages compromised in this business to suffer us to be betrayed. We have no *provocative agents* amongst us, and can defy the police, provided we are true to each other.”

“I am glad,” said Bras d’Acier, “that some

new plan is hit on to assist us ; for our trade is dreadfully fallen off since these lanterns have been placed in the streets. Where one robbery is committed, we had at least twenty formerly—what with these and the spies of the police, a man of honour finds it hard enough to live in these days.”

“ Expect,” said Le Sage cutting short these remarks, somewhat abruptly, “ to hear from me in a few days, when all shall be arranged. Vigoureux, are many of your band yet arrived in Paris ?”

The woman who was addressed, who, by her aspect, might be known as a gipsy, replied, “ Yes, my child, and I expect more soon. Some stray sheep of the flock are coming—they fall in from all quarters of the globe lately ; for when we appear none know whence we come or how. There is one, a stranger, last from Tartary, a great genius, but a difficult man to deal with—he may be made very useful but he has romantic notions of virtue rather

out of our line. You must see him, my child, if any one can bring him into the right path, and teach him his duty to the great Kali, it will be you."

"How is he called?" asked the supposed priest hastily.

"His name is Musa," replied Vigoureux. "I have seen him but once: he is of my kin. Some wandering fancy has kept him from his band for months, but he has lately re-appeared. We must be cautious with these offshoots of our community: those from Spain and the South are fitter for the woods and fields than cities."

"We will have some whom we can employ as domestics, as they know the usages of all countries, and can do us service in this new scheme."

"Farewell, then," said le Sage, "be all prepared for some great action, and depend on me. In seven days from this all Paris shall ring with the new Hôtel of the Polish sisters."

So saying, the director departed, and by degrees the rest of this respectable meeting dispersed several ways, all bent on mischief, which they found little difficulty in executing in the congenial atmosphere of Paris.

There is no exaggeration in this scene, as the records of the period plainly show. It would far exceed the bounds of a work of this nature to attempt a delineation of the habits and customs of the higher classes, a few particulars may be sufficient.

Not many years had passed since scenes of the most revolting description were permitted and gloried in by persons of the highest rank. Louis XIV., with all his faults, had at least introduced into society a tone superior to that which had previously existed. It was no longer the fashion to make use of oaths in common conversation, nor was it considered a meritorious act to be convicted of theft or cheating. True, such practices were by no means discontinued, and robberies and false play were still acts

committed by the fashionable young men of the day, but it was thought bad taste to boast of such feats, and the king discountenanced them altogether.

The time was no longer when Bullion invited a party of noblemen to his house to dine, immediately after an issue for the first time of *louis d'or*, when, in order to *amuse himself* with the cupidity of the courtly gallants assembled, he caused three large vases, filled with the new gold pieces, to be served up at the dessert. At this sight the great men, unable to endure such a temptation, simultaneously made a snatch at the treasure, filled their pockets with coin, and without standing upon the order of their going, rushed out of the house, leaving *the minister* to enjoy his jest at the expense of the state!

The courtiers of Louis XIV. were far from averse to accepting bribes or presents, nor did they object to sell themselves and all their families for money, but they had the grace to do so in secret.

It was well known to many of the young men of rank that their valets were members of the society called *Compagnons du Devoir*, and more than one of them had enrolled themselves amongst the fraternity. Gambling had risen to such a pitch, that to support their frightful excesses every means was resorted to, and, under feigned names, some of the younger sons of the best families in France joined the community, directed by *Le Sage*, and presided over by *La Voisin*.

At the time of the marriage of the Duke of Burgundy, when, at the fêtes then given, all the luxury of dress that distinguished the period was exhibited, and the nobles and ladies tottered under a weight of jewels and embroidery, the needy guests are known to have gained a great booty by purloining the ornaments of their neighbours. One *gentleman* had the daring to cut off a piece of the Duchess's robe, in order to get easier possession of a clasp of diamonds, which he coveted: he was seen

in this act, and recognised as a man of the highest family. It was, however, charitably considered that his reason for so conducting himself was, that he wished to obtain the means of paying the expenses of his own costume on the occasion in question, and his offence was passed over. Many noblemen, distressed for money, accepted the office of spy to the government or to private persons, and no base means were rejected to enable the dissolute courtiers to carry on their disgraceful and profligate courses.

The king himself was robbed in his own palaces, in the most audacious manner: several curious cases of this kind are told by St. Simon; he relates that the horses in the royal stables had all their housings stolen, to the value of fifty thousand crowns, though, at the time, the houses were filled with attendants of all descriptions, and being in summer, the nights were scarcely dark; but a more extraordinary theft was committed almost in the very face of the

king at Versailles, and the restoration of his property was attended with such extraordinary circumstances as to lead to the supposition that some person of too much rank to be named was the actor or abettor of the proceeding.

One of the principal state apartments was hung with drapery of crimson velvet bordered and fringed with gold. One morning it was discovered that all the ornament was cut off. This appeared a perfect prodigy to happen in a place so public by day, so closely shut at night, and so guarded at all hours, yet so it was, and in spite of every effort the thieves could not be traced; Bontems, the first valet de chambre was in despair; five or six days after the event the king was at supper with several of his gentlemen; all on a sudden one of the company observed a dark mass appear in the air just above the place where Madame, and Monsieur, the king's brother, were accustomed to sit, they being then in Paris. This place was opposite the windows which looked into

the great Court. The dark mass which seemed to have been thrown with force fell on the dinner table, making the dishes rebound with the weight of its fall. The king, hearing the noise, turned his head half round, and with the utmost coolness, remarked, "It is my fringes come back I suppose."

It was so indeed, the large packet contained the fringes clumsily rolled up, and they must have been thrown from a door-way of one of the antichambers: a piece of the fringe slipped out and fell on the king's peruque.

A written paper was within, which the attendants opened before they allowed the king to touch it, though he tried to take it from their hands. The words traced were as follows:—

"Take back your fringe, Bontems, the trouble is greater than the gain. My service to the King."

The hand writing was disguised and had the appearance of being that of a woman. Louis,

after it had been well looked at, rubbed and turned on all sides, read it himself, when his only remark was—

“ Well, this is sufficiently insolent,” in the quietest tone imaginable. He desired that the packet should be taken away: it was so heavy as to be difficult to lift, and when it was gone the king said no more about it, the dinner went on as before, nor was it ever afterwards mentioned.

CHAPTER V.

FELIX.

Amour, redonnez lui le dessein de meplaire ;
Mais, quoique l'ingrat puisse faire,
Ne sortez jamais de mon cœur.

MADAME DUFRESNOY.

WHEN the volatile Ninon, busying herself about the fortunes of Lomaria, was suddenly reminded of another gay and attractive gallant who had formerly been one of the ornaments of her saloons, and enquired how the marriage of Felix de la Varenne had succeeded, she at that time was not answered. It is necessary now

that he should be introduced to the reader, and that the circumstances of his becoming the husband of one of the richest heiresses in Auvergne should be recounted.

Madeleine de Mezeraye was young, handsome, a Countess in her own right, and the widow of a man who, dying a few months after her marriage, had left her his large possessions which adjoined her own in the neighbourhood of Le Puy en Velay in Auvergne.

She had already been several years a widow, when the connections of the Count Felix de la Varenne, and the friends of the lady resolved to arrange a marriage between them.

Felix was the youngest of his family, and the junior of the Countess, who nevertheless possessed so much grace and dignity and such agreeable manners, that a slight disparity of years appeared of little consequence.

Her proposed husband had but very little fortune, but his high birth, and remarkably handsome person were sufficient in his favour,

and the fair widow received the overtures of his family with pleasure, having in their brief interviews, on occasion of his rare visits to that part of the country, seen and secretly admired him; though she was careful to conceal her inclination till she found that no objection to their union existed.

The Countess had never been in Paris, and knew nothing of the life of the gay world; she had heard of the dissipation and dangers of that seductive capital, which was to her a world unknown and unsought, and she regarded her own mountains as the happiest sojourn, and looked upon her own domains as of the highest dignity.

As for Count Felix, early thrown into the vortex of fashionable life, he had run through most of its follies, and had not been more prudent than the rest of the young men of his age. He was naturally of a kind, amiable and confiding nature, extremely sensitive to first impressions, generous, romantic and easily carried

away by his inclinations, which were more inclined to good than evil, but had suffered from the influence of example.

Tired of the unsatisfying routine of a gay life, and after his first campaign, no longer feeling the enthusiasm which, on his first entering the career of arms, he had experienced, now that peace had been concluded he felt himself without occupation, and heard with little repugnance of the plan which his relations had formed for his establishment. He had felt no preference for the Countess Madeleine, but he recollected that she was an agreeable person, and her large possessions were an inducement to his consent to the wishes of his friends, as his small fortune had not a little suffered by a career of extravagance little suited to his moderate means.

He was not, therefore, when he considered the matter, sorry to redeem himself, and listened with complacency to the advice of his friend and relative, the young Marquis de

Seigné, who recommended him to take advantage of so good an opportunity.

It was not that de Seigné had any respect for the state, which he avoided himself, as long as he could, but he did not forget that Felix, in case of making a good marriage, could not only repay him certain sums with which he had supplied him, but occasionally assist him in any emergency, his carelessness and want of principle being equal to that of any of the dissolute, young nobles of the court.

Felix, therefore, quitted Paris, not without regret, but hoping soon to return with his rich wife and appear with all the splendour which his taste and habits led him to enjoy.

When he visited his intended bride, he was quite satisfied with the choice made for him, and considered her as even handsomer and more pleasing than he thought her on former occasions. As he had no mercenary views, and felt secure in her generosity and attachment he wished that the greatest part of her property

should be settled on herself, reserving his small patrimony only for his own use.

They were married with great pomp and ceremony, and Felix henceforth took the title of Count de Mezeraye, although his wife was in reality the possessor of all the estates attached to the dignity.

The novelty of his present position at first delighted Felix: his spirits were high, and his mind light and joyous; the round of fêtes consequent on the marriage amused him, and the variety he found in the customs and manners preserved in that remote part of France interested him, from their contrast to those he had been accustomed to in Paris.

He was fond of the chase, and in the woods of Mezeraye, and the neighbouring mountains there was ample field for the indulgence of his pleasure. The wolf, the bear, and the izard found him a formidable foe, and his time was continually occupied in sports which kept him always entertained and excited.

In this manner passed the first and second year of his marriage, and he had expressed no wish to return to the gaieties of Paris. At length, however, he began to tire of a country life, and proposed to his wife a visit to the capital, when, to his surprise and annoyance, he discovered that Madeleine had a decided aversion to the idea, and for the first time he observed in her expressions of dislike, something less obliging, less conciliating than he had been accustomed to. He gave up for the time all thoughts of removing from their present abode, and renewed his former mode of life, hoping that she would by degrees feel, like himself, a wish to change the scene which he could not avoid acknowledging to himself began to grow monotonous.

Far, however, from this occurring, a sort of jealous irritation appeared to pervade the manner of the Countess whenever he received letters from his former friends in Paris, and on one occasion, to his infinite vexation he found

that his wife had, in his absence, opened a letter from de Sevigné, one of his gay companions, which as usual was filled with the scandal of the Court and anecdotes of mutual acquaintances; the careless and fashionable friend of all the witty and profligate of the day had of course much to recount which sounded ill in the ears of one unaccustomed to the licence of the world to which he belonged.

The following extracts, for instance, were but little calculated to meet her approval:—

“ In the name of everything absurd, what can you be doing so long in the utter darkness of the country? Have you drowned yourself in your fish ponds? have you buried yourself under your roses, or hung yourself on your willows? are you living or dead? One is as good as the other in your case, for you are married, which I take to be entire annihilation of all that is spirited, gay, pleasant, or useful. They are trying to marry *me*! I know nothing about it, but leave the arrangements to

my mother. I mean, however, when all is prepared to decline the match. I forget who is intended to be my bride, but of course I should not like her, as one never likes anything proper—it is so insipid to do one's duty in a common way. I should never have remembered your existence, my dear friend, but to-night, at Ninon's, the fair enchantress spoke of you, and our gay doings when you were with us. La Flore is still dying for you, and will receive you as kindly as ever, when you return from banishment. Ninon sends you her love, she has such a boundless store! and hopes your wife is as ugly as you deserve for staying away from us. We are all ruined—not a sous left—I lost all I had in the world last night. Dangeau wins all—his is a great soul, and he gives it all to play: it is glorious to see him at the table. F. — has been found out cheating horribly, and is obliged to fly—poor fellow, how unlucky he is!

Brancas went by accident, you know how absent he is, to hear mass one day, and found it so amusing that that he returned again and again. His head was so turned that he ordered horses the next day, after hearing Bourdaloue preach, and set out for La Trappe. There he stayed two days, but caught so horrible a cold that he had himself well wrapt up, and drove back again to Paris. We have revived him: he found the convent very stupid, however, several of us think of entering it. Religion is such a fine thing, I am always pious after a great loss—and ten thousand francs is too much at once! Langlée and Grammont have been out, but unluckily neither of them hurt—it was hardly worth the trouble. The quarrel arose at play, from Langlée's familiarity, which displeasing Grammont, he observed—"Keep your impertinence till you are playing with the king. I will not endure it."

For the love of heaven devise some scheme to escape from your thralldom: how heartily

sick you must long since have been of your wife, I pity you from my heart."

Then followed several passages still less likely to please the eye of her who read such an effusion for the first time, and it was with a flushed cheek and clouded brow that she handed to Felix the offending letter.

"How, Madam?" said Felix, as he glanced at the too well-known hand, and his colour changed, and he bit his lip with vexation. "You have not surely opened a letter addressed to me?"

"Why not, Count Felix?" returned she, "a husband should have no secrets from his wife. Are we not one? are not our interests the same, and ought not our thoughts and actions to be communicated without disguise to each other?"

"I am far from agreeing with you," replied Felix. "These are particulars of import, harmless it may be, but not fit to interest a woman. You know nothing of the life of

Paris, nor of the style in fashion amongst the thoughtless men of the day—nor is it necessary that you should.”

“Certainly, I have no ambition to do so,” said Madeleine, contemptuously. “The wit, taste, and learning I have heard so much of as conspicuous there, do not appear to have inspired *your friend* by their influence.”

“De Seigné is a fool!” exclaimed Felix, much annoyed, “but, once for all, it is unbecoming in you to pry into these things, and in future I beg it may not occur.”

“You may well feel some shame at my reading that letter,” retorted Madeleine. “I had indeed not imagined that the profligacy of Paris, which you are so anxious to see again, was carried to such a point. This more than ever determines me to avoid going there, as it is no fit place for a married man, or woman either who knows her station.”

“This tone, Madeleine,” said Felix, “is

strange from you—you treat me like a boy, and forget that I am your husband.”

“ You oblige me to do so,” answered she. “ Alas ! are there then no attractions for you here, that you sigh for pleasures which you should have effaced from your memory, when you changed your condition ?”

“ You wrong me, Madeleine,” answered he kindly. “ I did but wish to change the scene, and introduce you to some who could not fail to gratify your taste, and delight your genius.”

“ Your love is sufficient for me,” she replied, “ I desire nothing beside, and I would fain see the same sentiment in you. I will never leave Auvergne.”

The last words were said with a firmness and decision which he had seldom observed before.

“ Then,” said he calmly but with equal decision, “ I shall be forced to leave you in solitude and go alone.”

A passionate burst of tears followed this remark, and it required all the temper and natural gentleness and indulgence of his character to enable Felix to support the angry reproaches which ensued.

These scenes were frequently renewed and he began to discover, to his consternation, that his wife's desire was to hold him in absolute subjection. By little and little he found that she was proud, haughty, tyrannical and self-willed; jealous and exacting; and possessing few qualities calculated to retain the affections which she strove to monopolise exclusively, for she loved him with unbounded attachment, would have sacrificed all for him, but required in return perfect submission and equal fondness. It had never entered her mind to suppose that she should meet with opposition from one younger than herself, whom she had preferred, and who was totally dependent on her. She was proud that all she had should be his, but that he must in return be hers, his thoughts, his

actions, his whole soul must be devoted to her, to the exclusion of every other feeling. Alas ! poor Felix, too late he found that a marriage of convenience, with love on one side only, is a dangerous experiment.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FLIGHT.

“ Qui n'apprehende rien, presume trop de soi.”

CORNILLE.

ANGELIQUE DE MERI was just returned from an interview with the Queen, who had in the most affectionate manner been conversing with her on the subject of Lomaria, whose attentions had now become the theme of general observation. There were not wanting many amongst the friends of the heiress who were ready enough to relate to her instances of her lover's

unworthiness, but she paid little heed to them as she was aware that they might be influenced by a variety of selfish motives, and probably none of them had her good in view. When, however, the gentle, amiable and considerate queen, who had always shown her the utmost kindness, and under whose protection she was considered, mildly represented the danger of her encouraging an admirer of the character of the attractive Breton, Angelique listened with startled attention, and began to interrogate her own heart, and tremble at the feelings she was conscious of entertaining towards him.

"Alas!" she said, "I have been warned from the first, yet, I have neglected all precaution. His presence is a spell upon me and whatever I may resolve in his absence is rendered void, the moment I hear his voice and look upon his countenance, which bears the impress of truth and virtue if any human signs may be believed. If he has erred it seems to me that he has long since repented the faults

of extreme youth, and it is cruel thus to keep in mind what his present conduct has atoned for. Yet the queen! she tells me she has sure knowledge not only of vices unatoned but of a recent crime of the most deadly nature, an act of cruelty not to be defended or endured. Can she really know this, or has he been maligned to her? There is no safety for me but in flight. If I see Lomaria I cannot continue to believe anything against him, and if he is guilty—"she paused, and, as she mused, her thoughts formed themselves into measure, and instead of writing as she intended when she placed herself, with sudden resolution, at her desk, her fingers mechanically traced on the paper these lines :—

I'd rather bear the heavy chain
That long has bound my heart,
Than wake to feelings, sweet and vain,
Which promise, and depart.

I'd rather waste a life of care,
Without one gleam of joy,
Than look on scenes all heavenly fair,
One moment can destroy !

That shine as tho' a spirit's wing
Had touch'd this earth of ours,
And, where he rests, unbidden spring
A world of perfum'd flowers.

But he is gone---his pinions light
Have fled the favour'd spot,
He flies to realms more pure and bright,
The charm, the scene forgot !

* * * *

Yet go---we met, we part, tis done,
'Tis well, the charm is o'er,
Perchance it might have lingered on
And each have sorrow'd more.

The place, the smile---perchance the sigh,
Together we have known,
Will rise again to memory,
Like music's softened tone.

A bird, a flower, a gem, once dear,
Is mourn'd ev'n to the last,
And thou---but why this idle tear ?
'Twas but a dream---'tis past !

“A dream, indeed!” said she, as she tore the paper and scattered the fragments, “it was not this I should have written. This is strange weakness and I must conquer it.”

So saying she set herself to write in earnest, and the letter which she hastily finished was superscribed—

“To the Countess Madeleine at the château of Mezeraye, Auvergne.

“You, dearest Madeleine, who are happy in the affection of an excellent husband, far away from the turmoil of a dangerous court, will hardly comprehend the dilemma in which I am placed, I have confided to you the feelings I have tried to conquer, I am more and more convinced that I ought not to allow them encouragement. Assist me with your counsel and your affection. I am resolved to leave this atmosphere of deception and care—will you receive me and let me consult you in person, when I can explain much more than I may

venture to write. Your Felix will not object to the friend of your childhood stealing a few moments of your beloved society from him. To see your happiness, while it will delight my heart, will cause me to sigh over the sorrows that seem in store for me."

Angelique waited impatiently for an answer to this letter. She communicated her intention to the Queen, who highly approved of her design of absenting herself from Court for a time. In a short time she received from the Countess a letter in return, thus conceived:—

"Angelique, you do right—fly at once from the dangerous presence of one whom you had better shun, whatever be his qualities. To love is to be miserable, to indulge even the most innocent affection is to draw down trouble and care on the heart. I am an instance of this—come and behold the effects of faith and trust in the vows of man.

You will not interrupt the felicity you paint so well—I have not seen my husband these six months!

“Delay not, I entreat you—I have a sadder tale to tell than you can bring me: above all, do not see him you love and dread before you depart, or you will stay and be lost.

“MADELEINE.”

There was a tone of bitterness as well as despondency about this letter which amazed Angelique.

“Can it be possible,” she cried, “that a union so perfect as she has long described that of herself and her husband should be so suddenly broken. What can it mean? She is unhappy and neglected, and I will hasten both to comfort her, and be warned by her example.”

Angelique set out from Paris, with a small suite, without naming her intention to any one, and arrived in Auvergne before it was known that she had quitted her post as attendant on

the queen by any but her royal mistress herself.

As soon as Lomaria and his gay companions discovered her flight, they were in great consternation. Consultations took place at the hotel of Ninon, and different plans were suggested.

"She must not escape thus," said Brancas, "we are all cruelly in want of money, and one year of her revenue would positively restore the tone of our existence. Why not waylay and carry her off as Chavignac did his wife? I am sure she cares for you by the very pains she takes to conceal it—she only flies from fear, not from aversion; but where is she gone—who can tell."

"We must discover immediately," said Lomaria—"set Charles Dufresnoy to find out—if any one can unravel a mystery it is he."

"Poor fellow," said de Grammont—"he is at his wits' end for money—the king gave him a thousand gold crowns last week, to pay his

laundress, and he lost them all. Did not you win them Brancas?"

"Yes,—poor wretch!" replied he who was appealed to. "I condescended to play with the king's valet, because I was low myself. He vowed to me that he had now no resource but to marry the woman; for he was so deeply in debt that he had no other way left to escape her anger at his numerous deceptions."

"Well—he is worthy of a better wife," returned de Grammont, "and is a fellow of infinite style and taste. Good Heaven! how well he sings!—we must get him to follow the traces of this shy fawn, and he shall come in for his share of the spoil."

Charles Dufresnoy the favourite valet-de-chambre of Louis XIV. was a very remarkable man: handsome, gay, witty, brilliant, and unprincipled; his manners were superior to the station which he held, and his dissolute habits and careless extravagance made him worthy to associate with the young noblemen who sur-

rounded the king. His genius and knowledge were universal, his grace and finesse peculiar, and his powers of concealing the truth unrivalled. He was a general favourite, and esteemed by many of those who did not know his real character. A secret was in great danger which he wished to discover, and he seldom failed to make himself master of all the affairs at Court.

He was, at the moment when his services were required to discover the retreat of Angelique, busied with a little concern of his own which had raised his spirits, and promised to emancipate him from the dangers into which his gambling imprudences had thrown him. A wealthy widow who kept one of the most fashionable cafés in Paris had of late shown towards him a very marked preference, and had gone so far as to hint that she had a beautiful niece, whom she intended to make her heiress, and who having lately become an orphan she destined for some distinguished person about Court, and Dufres-

noy had little doubt but that, with management, he might be the fortunate man.

His widow was now absent on a visit to this very niece, whom she intended to bring back with her to Paris, and the admired frequenter of the fashionable *Café de l'Ange* was on the very tiptoe of hope.

The offer of a considerable sum of money from Lomaria, if he could assist in bringing about his own marriage with *Mademoiselle de Meri*, and as a preliminary step, discover where she now was, stimulated him to exertion; and exerting all his arts, he soon learnt from the domestic of *Angelique*, sworn to secrecy, that her journey was to *Auvergne*, to an old friend of her childhood, the Countess of *Mezeraye*.

"This is most fortunate," said de *Seigné*, when the information was brought to the united friends of Lomaria, "she is no other than the wife of our old companion Count *Felix de la Varenne*, who has been losing his existence in that dull region for some time. I

occasionally write to him, but he tells me his wife objects to his coming to Paris, and will not accompany him. So he tamely submits to her dictation, and plants his potatoes on the sides of the extinct volcanoes of the Velay. But, though I have long given him up, this alters the case—my friendship returns. I am seized with a violent desire to see him: Lomaria shall accompany me and the prize be ours.”

Lomaria's eyes sparkled with exultation. “My friends,” said he, “I cannot sufficiently thank you all—believe me I will not be ungrateful. The first thing I shall do on marrying this golden nymph will be to dedicate a large portion of her property to your service, and the remainder will last probably as long as we shall desire to live and enjoy ourselves. As for her—she will be easily disposed of; for she adores me, and will consent to anything I propose. Is this Felix of whom you speak the Count de la Varenne?”

"The same," said de Sevigné, "a Breton family, but settled nearer Paris. He was poor and married the Countess for her money: she keeps him in her old rambling castle, near le Puy, and he finds it impossible to escape, so makes a virtue of necessity, and passes for a pattern of husbands."

"Oh," said Lomaria, "this is the same Felix who is my mother's hero and who has always been held up as a model for me. I never saw him, but particularly dislike him because he is sure to be produced on all occasions when my good mother imagines me in the wrong. However, I will accompany you on this expedition, de Sevigné, as you propose sacrificing yourself for me, and see if I cannot take a few lessons from this immaculate gentleman which may recommend me as a steady man."

"Lomaria," said Ninon rather gravely, "you might find a worse model than Count Felix. He is not without his faults, they are those of youth, and thoughtlessness, but his

heart is noble and exalted. He is generous, brave and to be trusted—de Seigné, you will do wrong,” she added turning to her former admirer, “to encourage this young man in too great levity respecting this marriage. The girl is rich, noble, and worthy—make what bargain you can, but let her be well treated. I hope your friend Lomaria has a heart?”

Ninon spoke with emotion, for after some observation of the young Breton's character, she feared that she perceived in him a fund of selfishness and art which his grace, eloquence, and beauty could not conceal, and she repented of having thoughtlessly recommended the very proceedings which appeared now likely to be too successful.

De Seigné she knew to be a cold-hearted man of the world, without energy or talent, beyond a few clever sayings, incapable of a great action, or a noble idea, mischievous from his example, not from his genius, careless of all save the amusement of the moment, and utterly

averse to reflection of any sort. She saw in Lomaria a very different person, and she feared that a depth of wickedness was hidden under the mask of honest simplicity, which his country breeding had at first permitted him to assume, but which she soon saw was but a veil of duplicity put on to mislead the unwary. She sighed as she heard the plots her gay friends were concocting, and she regretted that she had countenanced their plans.

“It is ever thus,” she said to herself, “my life is passed in imprudence, which I only exist to regret. I abhor deception and cruelty, yet my thoughtlessness is continually fostering both. I am myself an actor in the drama I condemn.”

But the admired and brilliant beauty permitted herself but little time to indulge in these sad thoughts. New pleasures, new amusements were suggested by her band of adorers, and all memory of Angelique’s danger and Lomaria’s unworthiness was lost in dissipation and excitement.

"I have been thinking," said de Grammont, "that the Court is so intolerably dull of late that we must introduce something to relieve its monotony. Would it not be a bright imagination to bring forward a ballet, and call it *Le roi d' Argot*, I would undertake to dance the first character myself, for I am pretty well acquainted with the manners of the race of thieves whose habits I wish to patronise, and make known in good society."

"Capital—inimitable!" cried several voices, "but we must first pay a few visits to the *Cour des Miracles* and study our parts," said Brancas, "who will be *mion de borelle*?"

"Explain, explain," said Ninon laughing. "I do not understand the mystery. I have heard of the *Cour des Miracles*, but require much information on the subject. Tell me, de Grammont, you who know the world of Paris from its highest to its lowest grade, what sort of community is this of which you wish to be the king."

“Fair Ninon,” said the accomplished profligate to whom she spoke, “you must know that in the neighbourhood of the most respectable convent of Les Filles Dieu at the entrance of the Rue Neuve St. Sauveur, and between the cul de sac de l’Etoile, and the Rues de Damiette, and Les Forges, may be found the kingdom of Argot, situate in that mysterious region called La Cour des Miracles. The extent of this kingdom is considerable, the domiciles of the inhabitants are mostly formed of mud, pavement is there unknown, a beautiful irregularity prevails both in the architecture and the furniture of all the houses. A labyrinth of streets, lanes and allies conducts to it, a considerable descent leads to the chief entrance, conveniently dark, narrow, and winding—it is like making a descent to another world, to approach it, and indeed many of the dwellings are modestly imbedded in the soil, so that in some, the roof alone appears like a blushing violet peeping from its couch of earth.

“Ease, absence of labour, liberty and happy indifference to the world’s opinion, here reign triumphant. It is a blissful valley from which the cares of the world are shut out. Goods are in common, yet strict order is kept up—nothing can be simpler or more edifying than the government established here—it is a model kingdom worthy to be imitated. The language partakes of the simplicity which reigns throughout—it expresses the wants of those who use it, and is eloquent in its primitive nature. The future is never thought of here: each man lives for the present, and enjoys life—what do we strive for more? Nothing of to-day is kept for to-morrow—a simple religion reigns amongst them, but worldly ties and trammels are unknown. Although a general liberty reigns, there are grades of society, and these have each their distinguishing title—for instance their king is *Le Grand Coësre*: then follow dignitaries named *cagoux*, *archi-suppôts de l’argot orphelins*, an interesting race! *Marcan-*

diers rifodes, malingreux, piètres, polissons francs-mitoux, callots, sabouleurs, hubains, coquillarts, and courtaux de boutange."

"What a catalogue," cried Ninon, "and how learned you are in their lore! Pray how do these worthies contrive to carry on their arcadian existence?"

"They have inexhaustible means in their own genius, which is a mine of wealth to them, and the folly of the Parisians help them greatly," said de Grammont, "but the church is their chief patron."

"How, the church?" said Ninon.

"Yes," replied he; "they are the great devisers of miracles; they are the great counterfeiters of diseases, which, being cured, bring such revenues to the church; they are the great fabricators of relics and the great concoctors of deceptions. Their trade never fails, and they are protected by those they serve, therefore are seldom in any danger, except their enthusiasm in their art carry

them beyond prudence, as sometimes happens. Amongst their number are to be found men of birth and quality, priests, soldiers, lawyers, in fact every description of person whom different untoward incidents have introduced to the kingdom, nor is it positively necessary to seek them in their own region. Members of the fraternity may be met with in many a place, where one would little expect to find one of so distinguished a body. They have their own reasons for leaving and for returning to their homes. It has been my good fortune to encounter several travellers from this happy country, and by this means I have not only become acquainted with their history, but have been admitted to their society occasionally.

“Thus you see, my friends, I am capable of instructing you in the habits, manners, costume, and bearing, which it will be necessary for you to adopt, and I doubt not but that we shall make up a ballet which shall cast into shade all that have ever gone before.”

These two notable designs suggested, it was agreed should be put in execution without loss of time. Lomaria and de Sevigné were to take part in the proposed ballet, the better to conceal their design of seeking out Angelique; and Madame de Montespan was to be enlisted into the plan, in order to secure the attention of the king. There was little occasion for persuasion on this subject, for the moment the idea was started, Louis, eager for new excitement, and certain that anything undertaken by de Grammont would be done well, was delighted with the prospect of an amusement he had never tried, and desired that every facility should be given to the actors in a drama which presented features so peculiar and exciting.

The plot of a ballet was immediately formed, new music was composed, and old airs adapted, complimentary lines were written by the Court poets, to be addressed by the beggars to the ladies: costumes were arranged, and all was

bustle and expectation at the Louvre, where it was settled that this scene should take place. La Belle Iris was delighted, even although Montespan had regained some of the king's attention by her suggestion: the demure Madame Scarron secretly rejoiced for her own reasons, though she sighed while she acknowledged her curiosity. The lovely Mademoiselle de Blois looked at her bridegroom elect, and asked his opinion, which he gave in favour of the projected amusement, though he thought only of her who asked it, and the ballet of the Cour des Miracles went forward.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BALLET.

“ Les meilleurs danseurs du royaume figurèrent le concierge et les locataires de la Cour des Miracles, par une sérénade et par des postures si plaisantes que tous les spectateurs avouèrent que dans le ballet il n’y avait point de plus facétieuse entrée.”

SAUVAL.

VERSAILLES was at this period a place given up to pleasure, the very region of gaiety and amusement. All care seemed to be banished from its enchanted walls and enjoyment had taken up a permanent abode in its magnificent gardens.

The royal dinner hour was early in the day, and, that concluded, the company assembled in the splendid suite of drawing rooms which were adorned with everything that luxury could invent to render them superb. Here princes and princesses, courtiers, ambassadors, beauties, and fops met together for the sole purpose of amusement, and on these occasions it was indispensable that every one should appear decked in smiles as if such things as sorrow or suffering were unheard of in France. Tables heaped with gold attracted the attention of the insatiate gamblers of the Court, and the king himself took an active part in this amusement of which he was seldom tired.

Louis, on the day fixed for the representation of the new ballet of *Le Roi d'Argot* was in high spirits, and as he pursued his favourite game of *reversi* his thoughts wandered to the probable entertainment it would afford, and the surprise it would create.

Dangeau, the inimitable player, whose re-

ceipts in a month, he boasted, were upwards of a hundred thousand crowns, was more than usually fortunate on this occasion—the floor was strewed with louis d'or, and it seemed as if the palace were the abode of the God of Riches himself, so carelessly was money thrown away, so gracefully lost and won.

De Montespan had dressed herself with the utmost taste and care, resolved, if possible, to eclipse her beautiful rival. Her robe was of point lace fastened with rubies over an under dress of white satin, so rich with pearl flowers as to stand alone. Her beautiful and luxuriant hair was arranged in a thousand curls, with two long ringlets falling on her cheeks from the temples. She wore black ribbons on her head looped with brilliants, and her shining tresses were confined by three or four bodkins of silver having diamond heads of the most elegant forms. This new head-dress was strikingly becoming, and had been adopted by her in

hopes to supersede that which the lovely de Scoraille had brought into fashion.

The latter formed one at the King's card-table, and her dress and appearance was no less studied than that of her rival. Her extreme youth permitted her to adopt any kind of dress however singular, with advantage, and the dress she wore on this occasion would have been trying to one less beautiful.

Her golden hair, which covered her head and shoulders with long soft ringlets, was fastened with rose buds, the leaves of which were of emerald. A pearl necklace of enormous size was clasped round her throat with the same jewels and immense pearls depended from her ear. Her under robe was a geranium satin, brocaded with black, in a rich damask pattern. The outer robe was of dove colour, worked in silver, lined with pale rose, and fastened back with large broaches of pearl and emerald. Her sleeves, of point lace, and stomacher were clasped with the same, and a chain of different

coloured stones of immense value bordered the bosom of her dress. Her gloves were of white, embroidered with golden flowers, and having a deep fringe at the elbows, of geranium ribbon, in loops, mixed with bows of gold lace. She held a fan of ivory fretted with gold, and inlaid with enamel miniatures, painted in the most exquisite manner. Her shoes were embroidered in gold and from head to foot she was indeed gorgeously beautiful.

Nothing could exceed the brilliancy of the two favourites, as with assumed friendly smiles they sat at the same table with the hero whom both strove to enslave. Louis looked from one to the other and felt it difficult to award the palm of beauty. Novelty, however, decided his taste, and his eyes were more frequently fixed on the bewitching creature, whom it was the fashion to call *La Belle Iris*, than on the witty daughter of Mortimar. He was, however, obliged to acknowledge to himself that the intelligence of the younger favourite did not

bear comparison with that of her rival, and though his looks were directed to the one, his conversation was addressed to the other.

Couriers arriving called the king from the gay saloon, and an appearance of important business gave zest to the enjoyment of his return, though Colbert, who encouraged rather than repressed his fondness for show and luxury, took care that nothing of very great consequence should inopportunately interrupt his gaieties.

Early in the evening numerous carriages arrived at the doors of the palace, to convey the guests to the promenades, where bands of music hailed their approach. Amidst the shades a surprise had been arranged in the appearance of a band of Bohemians, whose exquisite dancing was the theme of all praise throughout Paris, and who were now first introduced to royal notice. They had but lately arrived, and their singular appearance and strange style created the greatest excitement amongst the

fashionable connoisseurs, who saw them for the first time. Two girls of the troop were remarkable for their grace and beauty, and also for the extreme reserve of their manners, appearing, as they did, totally insensible to the applause they obtained, and wearing an air of disdain as compliments were showered upon them from all sides.

The chief male dancer was a young man of extraordinary grace and dignity, who executed a figure of rather a serious character, apparently representing a religious rite of some Eastern country. His beauty was so singular and striking, that he caused as much sensation amongst the ladies as his female companions did amongst the gentlemen of the court. He seemed looked upon as a person of consequence by his band, and on receiving showers of golden rewards from numerous fair hands, he dispensed the money amongst his people with the air of a monarch to his subjects. The Bohemians having finished their dance retired, overwhelmed

with praises, and the party repaired to the great canal where gilded barges awaited them. Another surprise here greeted the eager spectators—a palace of glass was made suddenly to rise from the water, in which were discovered nymphs and naiads who performed a concert, after which a fleet of silver boats, each drawn by a swan, issued from a neighbouring island, which had been created and moored in the stream for the occasion, and approaching the glass palace, the musical syrens were borne off to the shore, where they grouped themselves under the trees, and resumed their melody.

The finest fireworks then filled the sky with radiance ; for by this time night, with all her stars, had taken the place of evening. Refreshments were distributed in bowers and grottos, placed in different parts of the gardens ; and at eleven o'clock the company assembled in the theatre, where the novelty of the evening, the expected ballet, whose strange subject was known only to a few, was ready to be represented.

The programme of the piece set forth that a great marriage was on the tapis between the King of Argot and the most beautiful and ingenious of his subjects; a serenade was performed, in which the voices of the actors were heard to great advantage; it was interrupted by a sudden attack from officers of justice, who came to seize the person of the bride, who had distinguished herself by the ingenuity of the many thefts she had committed in the palaces of the Tuileries and Versailles, during the recent fêtes. She was accused of having been disguised with so much art that she had been mistaken, at different times, for every one of the celebrated ladies of the court. Her part was sustained by de Sevigné, whose rapid changes of costume represented, in an incredibly short space of time, the dress of several distinguished ladies, and who contrived so well to imitate the air, gait, and habits of each, young and old, that the spectators were all enchanted, and peals of laughter and ap-

plause rewarded his efforts. The Roi d'Argot appeared, and a compromise was entered into with the officers, that if they could not unanimously pronounce which of the courtiers they best represented, his bride should be set at liberty. The officers were provided with refreshments, and formed a circle, while the representation continued. De Grammont, as the king, then went through his part, which he managed as well as his friend de Sevigné, and nothing could equal the rapture which accompanied his exertions. Lomaria was his minister, and his songs and verses, composed by all three, in honour of each of the ladies, were pronounced inimitable. The officers declared themselves unable to decide which character was best personated, and the interrupted marriage took place, with all the rites peculiar to the Cour des Miracles.

The Roi d'Argot, or, as he was more ceremoniously designated, le Grand Coësre, was habited in a torn mantle, his head covered

with an old high-crowned hat, ornamented with shells: he carried a knotted club, which he used as a crutch, and he made his first appearance seated on the back of one of his ministers, called *Mion de Voulle*, enacted by Langlée.

A numerous body of clergy were introduced, much to the assumed horror of Madame de Maintenon and some other ladies, and these supported prominent parts in the drama, drinking and singing with infinite animation, in honour of the Grand Coësre, who in some mock heroic lines exempted them from paying him tribute.

A procession of his subjects, all of whom were proclaimed, as they danced along in bands, enlivened the scene. There was, in particular, a quadrille of young men, who much distinguished themselves, as *marquois*, or *gens de la petite flambe*, or *de la courte épée*, as they were sometimes called, in consequence of the scizzors which they wore, with which to cut purses—for the ostentatious mode of wearing the purse

hanging to the girdle, still obtained amongst the men of fashion of the day.

Another quadrille represented *les orphelins*, troops of young beggars, who then infested Paris, assuming every attitude of destitute misery, renowned as tremblers, shiverers, and weepers, and but little incumbered with drapery. These caused infinite amusement, and were admirably acted.

The *marcandiers* followed, two and two, dressed in respectable clothes, but without shoes, singing, in discordant strains, their griefs—stating that they were unfortunate mechanics out of work, disabled by fire and other accidents from getting a livelihood.

The *rifodés*, accompanied by troops of women and children, with each a certificate setting forth that their house and goods had been consumed by lightning, and swept away by floods, were considered peculiarly comic.

The *piètres* hobbled admirably as lame and halt.

The *hubains* exhibited rings of St. Hubert, which had saved them from the bite of a mad dog.

The *coquillarts* were covered with pilgrim shells, and announced their return from the shrines of St Jacques and St. Michael.

The *marpauts* and their wives, called *les marquises*, were irresistibly droll.

The *franc-mitoux* swooned to admiration, and the *drilles* swaggered about with long swords and committed a thousand vagaries.

On all this extravagance the Court looked with an eye of favour, and the ladies listened, not only without disgust, but with pleased attention to the dialogues which the *filoux* introduced into the ballet. The airs, which were generally pretty, and to which the thieves' poetry was set, were greatly admired and caught up and repeated, and it afterwards became quite a mark of good breeding to talk in the *style d'Argot*, and even the dresses of the day were called by some title analogous to the scene.

Scarcely was this ridiculous farce concluded when the bell sounded midnight, and a sudden solemnity was assumed by all present—silence reigned, demure looks took the places of laughter, and every one was summoned to the illuminated chapel of the palace where a mass was celebrated, which was then called *media noche*. This ceremony gone through the supper followed and every one was at liberty to give way to the joyousness of his heart, and unrestrained mirth and gaiety prevailed.

The success of the new ballet was complete. De Grammont, de Seigné, and Lomaria received the vociferous thanks of the whole Court, and the king was loud in his commendations of the novel device. “I did not know,” said he, “that my capital was so rich in great men, my curiosity is excited to become acquainted with the originals, so admirably have you represented them, and so worthy do they appear of sharing my glory. Let us drink to the prosperity of our brother Le Roi d’Argot.”

Lomaria, had on this occasion, as his friends expected, attracted the monarch's marked admiration. But he had at Court a friend of even greater consequence than the king himself, inasmuch as, without her support, no favourite of the day could expect his reign to continue. The apparently demure Scarron, or as she now began to be called de Maintenon, was no stranger to the handsome young Breton, although he was very young when she had first seen him, at a time when all the most dissipated society of Paris were in the habit of meeting at her house. His talents, his person, his recklessness, and a certain command which he possessed powerfully attracted her towards him. Young as he was at the period of their first acquaintance he had obtained a certain influence over her by the knowledge which she knew he had obtained of her manner of life, and on his reappearance she welcomed him with peculiar readiness, patronized him in the world of fashion, spoke of him to the king, and whenever

she heard his character canvassed was prepared to place it in a fair point of view. Her motives for thus acting were several: she admired and liked Lomaria, and it was always her policy to retain her early friends, and all those who had known her at a period subsequent to her entrance into the family of de Montespan as governess to the mysterious children whose birth was for a brief period kept a secret—a delicacy which Louis had long since thrown aside.

CHAPTER VIII.

GABRIELLE.

"That wonderful passion which to be defined is impossible, because no words reach to the strange nature of it, they only know who inwardly feel it, it is called Love."

SIR PHILIP SYDNEY'S *ARCADIA*.

"I came, I saw, and was undone."

COWLEY.

WE will now leave Paris and its amusements for a time and repair to a quieter scene, and introduce actors of a very different stamp from those we left dancing in the ballet of *Le Roi d'Argot*.

Not far from the left bank of the bright little river Serain, about three leagues from Auxerre,

is situated the small picturesque town of Seignelay, on a rising ground surrounded with vines and gardens, and commanding an extensive view of the cultivated country, through which the parent stream of the Yonne flows uninterruptedly amongst rich pastures and glowing fields.

One calm summer evening a stranger mounted on a horse which appeared somewhat fatigued by a long day's journey, paused on the summit of the hill which led into the town, and gazed for some time on the beautiful prospect spread out before him. His age could not be more than five and twenty, but the sadness and discontent of his countenance made him appear some years older at a first view. He might be considered extremely handsome, for his features were all finely formed, the shape of his head was peculiarly graceful, and his eyes dark and imaginative; yet the settled gloom on his face rendered his natural advantages almost null, and the paleness of his cheek and heavy glance

of his eye spoke of secret sorrow which weighed down and overcame the buoyancy of youth. As he continued to look round him the stillness and calm of the scene appeared to have its effect on his mind, and the dark shade by degrees cleared away, leaving a less melancholy expression on his features. He dismounted from his horse, and, allowing it to graze near, he seated himself on a bank covered with moss and flowers beneath the shade of a fine linden, and seemed to enjoy the contemplation into which he fell.

“Here at least,” he mentally exclaimed, “there is quiet and repose. In yonder village, bosomed in trees, there may dwell a happy race, who, ignorant and untutored, can yet find delight in their simple occupations and pleasures. Alas! it is too plain that the great world has no joy to give—the court, the camp—what is there there to please or to inspire? Feverish, hollow, deceptive all! Why was I not born a peasant in this charming solitude?”

I might have found a heart to reply to mine, which, though humble and unsuspected, might yet be full of high and noble feelings, and without education or experience, could compare with, nay excel, those bred in luxury and fostered in splendour."

His musings were suddenly interrupted by the sound of church bells, presently followed by distant music, which floated on the air, and seemed to rise from a neighbouring valley. It approached nearer and nearer, and he saw issuing from a little wood a party of villagers of both sexes, dressed in holiday attire, whose steps seemed directed to the spot where he was seated. They all sang in chorus, and he could distinguish the words of the song, which ran as follows :—

VILLAGE SONG.

The dew of morning lies
On leaf, and flow'r, and tree,
And painted butterflies
Are glancing wild and free.

Along the air a sound
Of jocund music swells,
And merrily ring round
Our cheerful village bells.

How blest a lot is ours
Who live by mead and grove,
Our realm is all of flowers,
And all our lives are love.
Each stream that murmurs by
Of mirth and pleasure tells
While, ringing merrily
We hear our village bells.

He rose as the villagers came nearer, and accosting one of them, asked his way to Auxerre.

“Oh, you are quite out of the way, sir,” answered the young peasant he had addressed, “it is three leagues from this, and you must take the lower road.”

The stranger made way for the advancing party, and, leaning against a tree near, watched them as they approached, and busied themselves in making preparations for a dance. The

rural musicians being placed and partners selected, all seemed ready, yet they lingered still, and appeared to be waiting for an addition to their company. The eyes of the stranger followed the direction of their impatient glances, and he presently saw, mounting the hill from the embowered valley below, a group of people hurrying towards them.

“ Oh,” exclaimed one of the peasants, “ here they come, the widow St Vallery, and her daughter Gabrielle, and, as usual, Musa with them—now then to begin.”

As he spoke the group came forward, and the stranger was struck with surprise and admiration at the remarkable beauty of the young girl whom they called Gabrielle. She was about seventeen, blooming, fair, and full of animation and gaiety: her sparkling eyes dancing with cheerfulness, and her rich colour heightened by exertion. Her figure was faultless, set off by the picturesque dress of her country—long ringlets of shining dark hair

streamed from beneath her snow white cap, tied with a silver ribbon—her little feet were encased in black shoes, with buckles, and her round, white throat was encircled with a black velvet band, from which hung a glittering Saint Esprit. She looked the very impersonation of happiness and content, and she met the welcoming shout of her friends with smiles of pleasure. Her mother, Madame St. Vallery, was a respectable and still handsome-looking woman, whose mild, amiable countenance expressed great delight as she observed her daughter's gaiety; and as, with untaught courtesy, she addressed the stranger, and begged him to remain and witness, if not share, in their amusement, he was surprised to observe in her words and action a more refined manner than those of her neighbours. Suddenly interested he seated himself near her while the dance went on, and the pretty Gabrielle was led forward by the young man who had been called Musa. He was of a slight, graceful form, and his move-

ments in the dance were full of agility and ease. His countenance was extremely animated, and a bright flush of joy was diffused over it as he gazed, with evident admiration, on his lovely partner. His complexion was so dark, and his eyes so black, that he evidently could not be a native of the country, and there was a peculiar expression about his looks and manner, which seemed to reveal an eastern extraction.

"Is that beautiful girl your daughter?" enquired the stranger of Madame St. Vallery. "I never saw so exquisite a figure, or so radiant a face! Can she be born in this place?"

The mother smiled with gratified vanity. "Yes," she answered, "Gabrielle is like her poor father, and often when I see her as she is to-day, her face reminds me of what he was when we first met under these very trees, when after his first campaign, he returned to our native village."

"Your husband had served then?" asked the stranger.

"Yes," replied the widow, "but as I had a little fortune, and my parents did not like me to marry a soldier, he gave up the army, and we set up an inn in the village; in which," she added with a sigh, "I now carry on business alone, with my daughter."

"Is that young man a suitor of your Gabrielle's?" asked the stranger.

"Oh, Musa? No—that is, he admires her I believe, but she is too young to think of those things, and Musa is not the kind of person to suit her—he is a good hearted boy, but he does not belong to our country, and has no occupation here."

"He looks foreign," said the stranger, "a remarkable countenance."

"He comes from Biscay," answered the mother, "and only passes occasionally through the Auxerrois with wares; we do not call him one of us, but we are always glad to see him, he is so amusing and good-natured."

"Can you give me and my horse accommodation for to-night?" asked the stranger, after being silent a moment, "you said, I think, you kept an inn."

"If you please to stay," replied Madame St. Vallery, "you shall have the best we can give, but it will be but rude, I fear, for one of your appearance," she added, looking at her proposed guest.

"Oh, I am but an artist travelling through the country," carelessly replied the stranger, "and by no means particular as to entertainment. I am going on to Auxerre, probably to-morrow, and I am sure I shall be content with my fare for a night."

At this moment the dance being ended, Gabrielle, approached her mother, and the stranger hastened to offer her a seat in the shade; she started as she observed him, and blushing deeply whispered to her mother, "Who is this? I never saw him before."

A few words explained, and as she looked again towards him her blush was renewed, for

his eyes expressed such unbounded admiration that it was impossible to mistake their meaning. She shrunk away from his gaze, which he did not withdraw, for he had fallen into a reverie which prevented him from observing her agitation. At length he started as if from a dream, and withdrew his glance, while his eyes filled with tears, and he allowed his head to sink between his hands in an attitude of profound melancholy.

Gabrielle now in her turn looked towards him—she was at first awed and half offended at his fixed gaze, surprised at its long continuance—and moved at his evident sadness.

“He has seen, and perhaps loved some one like me,” she said to herself, “poor man! what a pity one so handsome, and no doubt so good, should be unhappy. Mother,” she continued, “could we comfort him—is there anything we could do to help him?”

At this moment the stranger looked up and met the gentle, pitying eyes bent upon his own.

What a history to his enthusiastic heart that glance portrayed ! he saw, as in a mirror, tenderness, truth, virtue, love, mingled in one ray of beauty ; nor was he deceived, the mind of the village girl was one which would have done honour to the highest station—all that was noble, pure and good, all that refinement and education strives to teach, nature had planted there and the fruits were ripening with years, and asked but opportunity to draw them forth ; that opportunity had now arrived.

That night the stranger was received into the little cottage inn of Madame St. Vallery. He did not leave Seignelay the next day, nor the next, and several weeks wore on before he signified his intention of departing. When he did so both the mother and daughter appeared to hear of his intention with regret : he had talked as they had never heard man talk before : he had spoken of places and of things new and beautiful and interesting : he had revived old recollections of early days in the mother's mind, for

she had spent her youth in Paris, and had never since returned to that enchanted land: he seemed acquainted with all countries, could converse with Jacques, the ostler, of his native Brittany, or with Basil, the old smith, who had been a soldier, of countries beyond sea, all knowledge seemed to their unsophisticated mind open to him—even their very thoughts he seemed to know, and could divine their meaning when they found difficulty in expressing it—in short nothing like him had ever blessed their minds or sight, and to lose this transient vision was a real grief.

“How we shall miss you,” said the mother, with all the frankness of innocence; “how poor and dull will everything seem to us when you are gone; but you have no doubt a mother and sisters who will rejoice to welcome you back again.”

“I am without immediate connections,” answered the traveller.

"But you have a home? who knows, perhaps a wife?" said Madame St. Vallery, with a slight sigh.

The stranger turned deadly pale. "I grieve to quit this place," said he, "for I have passed here some of the happiest, nay the only happy days of my strange life. If I came back again some time hence perhaps you would have forgotten me."

Both uttered an exclamation—"Oh no, no, we shall never forget you, and you must come again—the air of our hills will restore your health, already you are quite a different person and since you say you must live by your art, where can you find prettier scenes than here? Why not make Seignelay your abode, at least sometimes?"

The stranger shook his head. "Happy dream," said he, "would that it could be realised! I will, at all events put you to the proof and before the summer is passed

expect to see me again and let me not find anything here changed."

That day the stranger left Seignelay, and pursued his journey.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BRIDE.

" Alas ! that having sought thee so long I should be now sorry to find thee ! "

ARCADIA.

SEVERAL months had passed since the gay dancers of Seignelay had attracted the attention of the young artist and he, then a stranger, was now an inhabitant of the pretty village, and the master of the rural inn ; she who shared it with him was the beautiful girl whose eyes had soon lured him back to that retreat he so much admired—he found that during his short

absence Gabrielle had lost her mother, and was sad and lonely in her little domicile. She did not attempt to conceal the delight she felt at seeing him again and long and tender were their conversations about her whom both regretted.

Louis Bernard, for so was the young painter called, after a struggle, it might be with his pride, at the alliance he wished to form, was at length so completely overmastered by the increasing affection he felt for the confiding and interesting orphan that he offered her his hand, which, as she had easily discovered that his heart was her's long before, she frankly accepted.

"Ah," said she blushing, but with an arch expression, "I am a wife but little worthy of you—you will have much to improve in one so uncultivated—but I will be an attentive pupil and try to do you credit. All I have is yours, but I fear you will be as much wanting, on the other side, in business matters. How shall we

manage our inn, Bernard, now that my dear mother is no longer here to direct us?"

"It matters not my beloved," answered Bernard. "I am poor now, but I have a little estate in the South, from whence I derive a small revenue—it is embarrassed at present, but as soon as I can arrange matters we will leave the inn and live elsewhere. I should make but a sorry inn-keeper—we artists are idle folks. I fear your relations and friends will think you have made a bad match."

"Oh," said Gabrielle eagerly, "I have but one relation that I know of, my mother's sister, whom I have not seen from an infant—she lives far off and has seldom interfered with us—and as for friends I have but you in the world—what do I want beside?"

It required but little preparation for a marriage so simple as theirs; there was no person to interfere or interrupt their happiness, and every friend and neighbour rejoiced that the amiable and charming Gabrielle, whose unprotected

situation, since her mother's death, had excited general interest, should have found so respectable a husband as the young artist, who, though extremely reserved and shy in his manners appeared possessed of pleasing qualities, and in easy circumstances.

He was soon installed as master of the rural inn, the affairs of which he seemed but little to understand, but with the assistance of Jacques who had lived, from a boy, on the premises, everything went on as quietly as ever, and the extreme affection of the young couple was the theme of amusement as well as admiration to all.

Nothing could be more perfect than the union thus formed. Every day proved to Bernard that it would have been impossible for him to meet with a character so exactly suited to his own as that of his beautiful wife, and to her he was all that a tender imagination could picture of goodness, truth, and devotion.

“How could we have existed, dear Bernard,”

would she exclaim as she looked sweetly up into his admiring eyes, "before we met—I cannot believe that we lived or breathed till then. Why did I not feel that you were necessary to me—and you—how did you pass your days without knowing me?"

A cloud passed over the brow of the young artist, which however was instantly succeeded by a smile of affection.

"It is useless to think," said he, "of the past—all that came before must be effaced from our minds. We are both orphans and now live but for each other—let us never allude to times when we merely breathed, without loving—for love like ours is all of life worth knowing or existing for."

"I sometimes fear, Bernard," said Gabrielle while a slight shade passed over her features, "that happiness so perfect as ours cannot last; that something must come to disturb it. You will think me weak perhaps, but there are times when I feel that to lose sight of you for a

moment is agony to me, and if you are absent for an hour I tremble lest we should never meet again."

"This is idle indeed my Gabrielle," replied Bernard, "and, though to part with you but for a brief space, gives me a pang, I am almost ashamed to confess I feel, yet we must not give way to these fancies, and still less so as I must very shortly leave you."

Gabrielle became in an instant deadly pale, and clinging to his arm exclaimed—"Oh that word—leave you! I cannot bear to hear it for the first time. What can you mean."

"It is necessary," returned he with an effort, "for me to visit my little farm and collect my rents—else how, my dearest," he added gaily, "are we to live. My ignorance has not increased your income, and my habits, I fear, are more expensive than become me."

"Oh," said Gabrielle anxiously, "we are not poor—there always was enough for me and my mother, and why not for you and I? Do

not go away—there cannot really be necessity.”

“There is,” said Bernard, rather gravely. “I must leave you to-morrow, and be absent four or five days—not longer—not for worlds would I be longer. After that we need not part again for many months.”

“Why not take me with you?” asked Gabrielle suddenly, with a bright smile.

“No, no,” answered her husband, “the journey is long—the country strange—that were impossible. But let us forget that I must go, and till the moment of my departure talk only of our happiness and love.”

Gabrielle said no more on the subject : there was something about her love for Bernard, deep, devoted, and tender as it was, not altogether unmixed with a certain feeling, which at times almost amounted to fear. She trembled lest a word, a look, even a transient thought, and of her thoughts her face was a reflection, should give him pain or recal recol-

lections he might wish to avoid : and though the most perfect confidence reigned between them, while she told him all that concerned herself, past and present, in her young life, she waited for his communications with happy patience, but never importuned him with questions or inquiries. She cared not for the time gone by : it was enough for her that he was her's entirely, and she was so innocent of the world and its habits that the life of her village seemed to her that of the whole human race. Sometimes her mind, gradually opening to more enlarged observation, led her to think of persons and things beyond, but they seemed only the creatures of a dream or of a poetical imagination, which, though she was aware she possessed, was looked upon by her as a pleasant gift to be enjoyed not trusted. Bernard was all that her mind had conceived, and she became possessed of her ideal good almost as soon as she conceived it. She had nothing to desire, her heart was full, and hitherto no care had in-

terrputed this blissful state of existence, as far as concerned her husband. The loss of her mother was sudden, and her feelings received, by her death, their first shock. The return of one whom that mother had so much regarded, soothed sorrows to which no one besides could minister, and to him she had transferred all the love which she had felt for the beloved author of her birth. Bernard was her mother, lover, husband in one, and on him and towards him every thought of her mind was directed: on him she relied, in him she trusted, to him she looked as to a superior being, and rendered him the homage of a gentle, pure, confiding, and devoted heart.

The love of man is very different from this, but Bernard loved as the best of men love, and in his eyes Gabrielle was an angel of truth, innocence, beauty, and affection.

The day after Bernard left his wife to take the journey of which he had spoken, Gabrielle was sitting listlessly in a bower of her little garden, which was their favourite retreat, and

where she had received his last embrace as they parted. She looked around upon the peaceful scenery, the hills covered with vines, the sparkling river seen here and there winding amongst the green and flower-covered windows, and the distant road which led to great towns, of which she scarcely knew the names.

She held in her hand a paper, on which Bernard had roughly sketched the landscape, and her tears fell on it as she traced the lines drawn by his hand. Presently she was disturbed in her reverie by a step near her, and, looking up, beheld advancing a figure which she recognised at once as that of an old acquaintance, Musa, the handsome Bisacyan, whom she had not seen for many months.

"Oh, Musa," said she, extending her hand, "you are welcome once more. It is long since we met."

Musa sprang forward, his dark eyes flashing with delight to receive her proffered hand,

which he kissed with so much eagerness that Gabrielle almost started as she withdrew it.

"You have been travelling far," said she, "much has happened since we last met—my poor mother"—She covered her face with her hands and wept.

Musa stood silent, at length he said—

"Gabrielle, you are then an orphan. Alas ! is there not sympathy between us ? But you have known happiness, for a mother's arms have held you, a mother's voice has cheered you. This joy I scarcely knew, I can only feel the grief of such a loss without the memory of the former blessing, except in dim snatches, like the uncertain light of the marsh fire, which leads only to delusion."

He spoke in a wild, melancholy tone of such deep feeling that Gabrielle felt a thrill of gratitude for the pity his words expressed.

"Poor Musa !" she said, "perhaps you are, then, the most to be pitied."

"Yes, Gabrielle," returned he, "I have

been so. I have long existed, without a friend or parent, alone in the world, harshly treated and oppressed: but few bright moments have been mine, and those few I owe to your kind mother, who, when I was sick and wretched, a stranger and a wanderer, received, and tended, and cherished me. But she is gone—you alone remain—you, Gabrielle, are left without a brother, a friend—and Musa returns to find your hearth desolate. But hear me, I am not so destitute now as when I first passed through your village and beheld you first. I have some wealth, and a heart which beats with tenderness for you."

"Hold, Musa!" exclaimed Gabrielle rising, a sudden light breaking upon her mind, "what are you saying!"

"That my life, my soul, my fate are in your hands," cried the impassioned Musa, falling at her feet, and kissing the hem of her robe with oriental humility. "I love you, Gabrielle—you must have seen and known it long. I

adored you from the first instant we met : your image has never left me, your eyes have shone upon me through all the darkness of my destiny. I am yours only, and I ask your love—yes, I will sacrifice all—all the hopes I had long nurtured, all the glories promised by my star—everything, to live and die at your feet.”

“Musa,” cried Gabrielle, who had vainly tried to interrupt him, “rise, I entreat, I command—you terrify and distress me—there are crime and sorrow in what you say—remember what I am now and cease, if you would ever have me regard you except with detestation.”

“Is it a crime, beloved of my soul,” he continued, “to tell the truth, and beg your pity?”

“Do you not know, then,” said Gabrielle trembling, “that you speak to one who is the wife of another?”

Musa started to his feet—his face became of ashy paleness—his large dark eyes were dis-

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tended, his hands clasped firmly together, his lips open, but no sound escaped them: he stood the image of despair. At length with a deep-drawn breath, his words found utterance:—

“ Another’s !—married !—no, no—it cannot be. The stars said otherwise; I have watched them for many a night—there was danger and sorrow on my path, but it was not that. It cannot be true.”

“ Musa,” said Gabrielle in a gentle, but firm voice—“ it is true. I am married, and to a man whom my heart chose above all others. I am happy and beloved.”

“ And I,” cried the Biscayan, casting himself furiously on the ground, “ I am annihilated—my hope is gone—my peace fled for ever, and she tells me she is happy !”

He continued to rave, deplore, and utter incoherent expressions of wild grief, such as filled the mind of Gabrielle with fear and astonishment; for far different was his present

passionate conduct to the calm, usually silent and respectful being she had hitherto known him. Unprepared for this burst of feeling, distressed, and annoyed, she scarcely knew how to act. She feared his violence would attract the attention of some passer-by, and she knew not whether to soothe or chide him into reason.

She spoke to him in as calm a manner as she could assume, and entreated him to exert his good sense and to command his feelings, and by degrees, as he listened to her, he became less agitated.

“ But who,” cried he, “ tell me who he is to whom I owe this wretchedness.”

“ He has not injured you,” replied she, “ you are unknown to him: he knew not of your attachment to me more than I did myself.”

“ How,” exclaimed the young man, “ say you that you knew it not!—not read the secret written in my every look, my every sigh—not guess it without words—not know it without explanation—when I fondly thought you shared or might share all I felt. Fool that I was!—

why did I delay so long—why came I not before this rival, to claim my own, and teach you to love one to whose adoration his can be but chill and worthless.”

“Enough,” said Gabrielle coldly, “I have heard you too long. We must part—I would be still your friend, but such words as these offend and wound me.”

“Yes, we will part,” said Musa hastily, “you are to me, what you ever were, sacred and beloved, but he, your husband—let him know me for his foe—I swear to be his bane, his curse through life, to pursue him with hate and vengeance to the last.”

“Go, ungrateful man!” cried Gabrielle indignantly. “You are unworthy of my forbearance, unjust and wicked as you are, leave me and let us never meet again. Our paths must henceforth be far distant. If you have any generous feeling left you will never seek me more.”

So saying she hurried away, leaving Musa

gazing after her, motionless, and with an expression in his face of such fixed despair that it seemed as if the features could never recover their flexibility. He pressed his hands to his bosom as she disappeared intirely from his view, removed his glance slowly from the cottage, and with a long, deep sigh, full of misery unutterable, fled from the spot.

When Gabrielle returned to her cottage she was surprised to observe an unusual bustle and confusion ; people were hurrying to and fro carrying packages, voices were loud in exclamation, and several strange faces appeared in the little parlour of the inn.

As she entered she heard words uttered in a shrill tone which seemed to concern her.

“ And so she is not in the house, strange enough methinks, for a person in her position. I must see that things are ordered differently. My poor sister !—well this is a change indeed.”

As Gabrielle stood in the door-way observing what was going on, and hearing these and many more speeches delivered with great volubility, the speaker, turning suddenly round observed her and stopped short.

She was a tall, stout woman of about fifty, with a very florid complexion, heightened by art, sparkling, quick, grey eyes, and good features, somewhat strongly defined. Her expression was one of good humour, and self-satisfaction—her air commanding and her dress, extremely showy, of the very newest mode of the day, and arranged with more art than neatness.

“Are you my niece, Gabrielle?” exclaimed she as she looked rather admiringly at her to whom she spoke, “very handsome I declare. Let me embrace you, my dear, we shall I hope be better friends soon. I am come from Paris on purpose to see you, for I considered it was far from proper for so young a person to be left entirely without protection. I am your

nearest relative—indeed I may say your only one. It is pleasant in the country at this season, and Paris is quite deserted, so I thought I could not choose a more fitting moment, besides I am all for propriety, and it was my duty. I hope, my dear, my poor sister always inculcated in you a due sense of duty, and we shall I am sure be very good friends. Don't cry, we are none of us immortal, to be sure she was but young, scarcely a year my senior. Poor dear, my tears have flowed freely for her loss, your letter was very pretty, and Mademoiselle Ninon was quite affected by it I assure you. I never answered it because I always intended to come and surprise you. Do you think me like my poor sister? You are her very image, except the eyes—they are the father's. Pretty little rural place. Where is Justine and all my things? I am come to pay you a long visit—better late than never.”

Gabrielle listened in astonishment, nor unmingled with alarm, at this long tirade, without

being able to obtain from her vociferous relative a moment's hearing. She found it was quite unnecessary to offer her welcome or to arrange anything for her, as she had already taken possession of the room she preferred, and examined every part of the house, ordered refreshment for herself and her maid, Justine, and was as much at home in a few minutes as if she had lived in the cottage all her life.

Although her volubility was so extreme and her conversation continually shifting from one subject to another, so that all answers to her questions seemed unheeded, she contrived to hear and note everything and appeared to have the power of making herself mistress of all she saw in a very short space of time. Gabrielle could not help being amused at her extreme ease and confidence, and as she was necessarily from her retired life, somewhat diffident with strangers, the readiness with which her aunt accommodated herself to her new position considerably relieved her.

"So this is the humble way in which you live," said she as she took her seat beside Gabrielle under a trellice of luxuriant vine at the door of the cottage, "pretty enough, and quite like a scene of *Mademoiselle Scudery*—but you are much too pretty to stay here any longer. If I had known you had been half so good looking I should have sent for you to Paris directly, it is really quite a pity. Don't you long to go to Paris?"

Gabrielle smiled as she answered, "no, aunt, I have never thought about it. I have duties, and happy ones which—"

"Oh, yes," interrupted Madame Collard for so was the talkative lady called, "I know—you mean your little establishment here; but I am all for propriety, and to speak the truth you are over young and over attractive to be a landlady. Not that beauty stands in one's way in such a position—but though I keep a similar establishment in Paris—my hotel is on a different scale—besides I am older—though certainly

you are very like me, and not so *very* young looking either—but all this must be altered. We will sell this tenement and the land, I will take you back with me to Paris; with the small fortune you have, and an addition from me—besides your being my heir, we shall soon establish you and—”

“But aunt,” interposed Gabrielle—

“Oh, nonsense,” continued her aunt, “all girls pretend not to care about this sort of thing. I did so myself till I saw my poor beloved husband—you will soon attract attention, and who knows you may find a noble husband—all the rank and fashion in Paris frequent my café, the Café des Anges in the Rue du Colombier, all the wits—Racine, Baron, Scaramouche—poor dear Molière is gone! but Mademoiselle Ninon very often comes I assure you.”

“Who is Mademoiselle Ninon?” said her bewildered niece, to whom all this was mere sound without meaning.

"Who!" exclaimed Madame Collard, in amazement, "well, this is simplicity indeed! It is time you came to Paris. Not know Mademoiselle Ninon? the life, soul, inspiration of all the beaux esprits of Europe. Not a gallant dare show his figure on the boulevard if she have not commanded him; not an author ventures to produce his piece till she has perused it, and no one gives judgment till her's is known. No man becomes famous till he has fought duels for her sake. She is a Venus—a Grace—she is Paris, and Paris is void without her! Oh you have much to learn—but once under my care, we will see if my country dove will not soon find a mate."

"But aunt, pray hear me," exclaimed Gabrielle, out of all patience, "suppose I have already made my choice, and decline your offers altogether."

"How," cried Madame Collard, "decline? chosen? what does this mean? Speak pray, I am only waiting to be told all you please."

"It is no secret, dear Madam," continued Gabrielle, "I am already married."

The countenance of Madame Collard instantly fell—a frown appeared upon her brow, and a vexed expression took the place of her previous lively demeanour, as she said—

"Absurd! and who's your husband?"

"He is absent," replied Gabrielle, "for the first time since our marriage, but he will return in a very few days, and then you will see and know my dear Bernard."

"Bernard," said Madame Collard in a voice much subdued by the unexpected information, "that's your name, then? Well, and your only relation not consulted?"

"I regret it, dear aunt," returned her niece, "but your silence made me imagine, no doubt unjustly, that my affairs only troubled you."

"How unlucky," said the mortified lady, "I would have prevented this. And pray who

and what is this fine husband whom your experience has chosen?"

Gabrilie answered rather hastily.

"Louis is a man whose talents have hitherto supported him—he is an artist, but now he no longer exercises his art."

"Oh, no," interrupted her aunt contemptuously, "he contents himself with the profits, no doubt, of your labour, and lives in idleness, going off to amuse himself as soon as he has got as much money as he wants, and leaving his wife in solitude. I know what men are—oh, fie! fie! what imprudence to marry an adventurer, without a louis in his purse—an idle dissolute—"

"Hold, madam," cried Gabrielle proudly—"I entreat you to spare your needless indignation. The man I am proud to call my husband is no subject for your invectives. He is as far above all slander as he is superior to his humble wife in instruction, and all the gifts of nature.

He is not poor, nor an adventurer, and his absence is caused by the necessity of visiting a small estate, of which he is the possessor, and the revenue of which he is gone to receive."

"Indeed," said Madame Collard, "that makes some difference — don't be offended, niece—you seem a little warm, like my poor sister, perhaps I am to blame, and it is not so bad after all. We will get him a place and provide for you both."

"We are very happy here, dear aunt," said Gabrielle blushing at her late vehemence, "he will soon return, and shall thank you for your kind intentions himself, though I do not think he wishes any change, for we have all we desire. Indeed I believe it impossible to be more contented than we both are."

"How poetical! what a subject for Scudery," exclaimed the aunt, "you must positively be presented to Mademoiselle Ninon—you would just suit her!"

Gabrielle did not attempt to interrupt her

sunt again, but allowed her to indulge in eloquent descriptions of the glories and beauties of Paria, unchecked, while her thoughts wandered to Bernard and dwelt somewhat uneasily on his probable annoyance at the interruption to their domestic solitude, which awaited his return.

“ He is never fond of strangers,” mused she, “ and my aunt is so little likely to suit his tastes and ideas. I hope he will not be displeased or vexed, yet it has happened very unluckily. I could not have foreseen this—would it could have been prevented.”

But all reflection was now useless : Madame Collard had taken possession, and seemed perfectly satisfied with her position — all Gabrielle could hope was that, after the first burst of novelty had subsided, her vociferous aunt would become quiet, and tire of their company, and would shorten her visit.

CHAPTER X.

A CHANGE.

Human pleasure is transient as the shadow of a cloud.

HITOPADESA.

ON the evening of Madame Collard's arrival, while she was occupied in arranging everything in her apartments as she thought most comfortable, Gabrielle, whom she had at length left free for a few moments, had strayed into her garden and was mechanically gazing along the solitary road by which her husband had departed. She thought of Musa and his

strange avowal, of her aunt and of Bernard's probable impression of her, and she became almost bewildered with the rapid succession of events which had occurred during the brief absence of him with whom she had lived in such complete solitude, that any interruption even of the most trifling kind would have been felt, and this she could not but consider of some consequence in their future. Occupied with these thoughts she continued musing, when a voice, which she could not for an instant mistake, uttered her name: she started up, and found herself clasped in the arms of Bernard.

"My beloved, my dearest Gabrielle!" exclaimed he, with emotion, "you are safe—you are well, and my presentiment of evil was folly!"

"What did you fear, my dear husband," said Gabrielle tenderly, smiling as she spoke, "nothing but your absence could distress me; but you are returned, before even I dared to

bend my thoughts that way, although in spite of myself I expected you at every instant. Not a leaf stirred, but I hoped might be your step; not a sound, but I imagined might be your voice; and here you are indeed!"

"Yes, Gabrielle," said he, "but you will think me distracted when I tell you what has brought me back. Nothing but my foolish fears—a foreboding of ill which haunted me from the moment I left you. I had not reached the half of my journey when this terror so encreased upon me that I could go no further. Will you believe it, I determined to leave my business undone for the present, and resolved to return at once, for I could not bear to live out of your sight another moment."

With smiles, tears, tender rallying, and the sweetest expressions of fondness and grateful affection, did Gabrielle listen to her husband's account of himself. He informed her that in the course of a few days he must again set

forth, but his absence would be very short, as he had merely to receive his rents, and then there need be no interruption to their domestic enjoyment for many months to come.

"And now let us go into the cottage," said Bernard, "I long to see everything in its accustomed place—to feel once more secure beneath our roof, with no eyes but our own upon us, and no thought of parting to come between us and our happiness."

"My dear Bernard," said Gabrielle, with a slight hesitation of voice as she laid her hand on his arm, "I have not told you yet—I had not time to say what has happened since you left me—"

Bernard turned instantly very pale—she hastened to continue.

"Why this is weakness, dearest, everything startles you, how pale you look—I fear you are fatigued and harassed—what I have to tell is of no great consequence, except that it may not be altogether pleasant to you to hear—"

my mother's sister is come to pay us a visit, and is now here."

Bernard's colour returned, but he looked annoyed, as he asked hastily—"What brings her here?"

"Oh," said Gabrielle, playfully, "to see her niece of course: she had taken a sudden interest in me, and had formed a scheme of carrying me back with her, and making my fortune, at Court, I believe."

"Does she come from Paris?" enquired Bernard, in some agitation.

"Yes," returned his wife, "she has lived in Paris long, and is very proud of her acquaintance with the great there. To hear her talk one would think there was no other world. You will be amused at all her descriptions: she is tedious and rather strange, but seems good natured and friendly. So unlike my dear mother, but still you may not—you will not doubtless dislike her, Bernard."

The last words were uttered in a depre-

cating tone, occasioned by the cloud which Gabrielle could not but observe, rested on her husband's brow.

"What meddling nonsense brings her from Paris?" he half muttered. "Surely you did not invite her, Gabrielle? you are not tired of our quiet, our solitude?"

"Bernard!" cried Gabrielle reproachfully. He caught her in his arms and kissed her tenderly. "Forgive me and bear with me, Gabrielle," exclaimed he, "I am weak, childish and unjust. I would rather that this aunt had not come, but since she is here—I will remember only that she is your mother's sister, and welcome her as I ought. Fear me not," he continued wiping the tears from her cheek, "you shall not blush for your choice."

"No," returned she, shaking off her sadness, "she will see how unjust her suspicions were; imagine dearest, she thought you an adventurer and a clown—shall we not laugh to observe her astonishment when she sees what you really are!"

Arm in arm the pair entered the cottage, and Gabrielle immediately went in search of her aunt in order to introduce her to Bernard without loss of time. She found her full of business and importance, and delighted to hear of his return. Adjusting her dress and giving a parting look into the little mirror she accompanied her niece to the room where Bernard awaited them. He was busy in looking at a drawing of his own, at the back of which Gabrielle had been tracing some tender lines expressive of their love: his countenance was radiant with delight, all cloud was gone from his face, the bright flush of health was heightened by the happy thoughts which were passing through his mind, and he looked as if he deemed care and sorrow were banished for ever from that spot which contained all he held dear, as with a moistened eye he kissed the paper.

At the moment that Madame Collard entered his back was towards her, but she was not slow to observe that his form was one worthy of ad-

miration, that the shape of his head was fine and his bending attitude peculiarly graceful. As he turned round, on hearing a step, his bright smile and sparkling eyes met her view—she gave one long, amazed, scrutinizing glance, and stood transfixed to the spot, while Gabrielle hurried to her husband, and smilingly and with some pride presented him.

“ This is Bernard—this is my husband, dear aunt,” said she, “ you will I am sure be soon good friends.”

But Madame Collard uttered not a word—there she stood, fixed and motionless, and as Bernard approached and offered her his hand, she made no movement of acceptance. Gabrielle was greatly amused, she whispered to him. “ You see the effect you have made,” and turned away to conceal her smile.

Bernard, who had started with a sudden exclamation as they entered, surprised as he was in a moment of tender weakness—hurried to her with great cordiality, took her hand and kissed her cheeks with much gallantry.

"Madame Collard," said he gaily, "we are much honoured by this visit—I fear you will find us a homely pair, but all we can offer is yours. You come from Paris my wife tells me—a fine place I have heard—you will think our village but a dull substitute."

"Sir—my lord," faltered Madame Collard, "I—I—am you my—that is are you Monsieur Louis Bernard?"

"Your niece's husband, dear aunt," replied he quickly, wishing to relieve her evident agitation, "not so good a one as she deserves, but one who loves her dearly. A poor artist with little fortune, but his talent and his love. You will see much that will claim your indulgence, I fear, for I am new to this sort of business, but our little inn will thrive if you will condescend to give us your valuable advice."

Bernard seemed animated with so great a desire to render himself agreeable to his new aunt that he did not cease talking to and welcoming her, and Gabrielle felt that he was

exerting himself to atone for the cool and vexed manner in which he had received the information of her arrival. He became dearer still to her than ever, as she reflected on his kindness, and she redoubled her attentions to her aunt to whom she considered herself indebted for this proof of her husband's amiability.

"Have you never been in Paris?" asked Madame Collard of Bernard as they sat at their social meal, in a tone from which all her former flippancy was gone.

"I have passed through on business," answered he carelessly, "but we artists who are not known are lost in great towns, and I was not rich enough to stay long."

"Indeed," said Madame Collard, "it is a pity—if Mademoiselle Nimon saw you, your fortune would soon be made—I have certainly seen you in Paris—at least—"

"Some one like me, aunt," interrupted Bernard—"but we Bretons are not fond of leaving our homes; and but for my pretty wife

here, I should never have staid away from Quimper, where I was born."

"Well, you Bretons are handsome creatures," said the aunt, recovering her ease by degrees, as Bernard filled her glass from a fresh bottle, which he was busy in opening as he spoke—"there is young Lomaria, one of the handsomest, finest, most accomplished gallants at Court—he is a Breton—oh, Gabrielle, if you could see him dance his *passe-pieds*—they are quite the rage in Paris, everyone is in love with him, and all the men are trying to learn the steps. Ninon vows she will banish all from her presence who cannot dance the *passe-pieds*. Of course you dance, Monsieur Louis—do let us see a specimen—with your shape and figure it must be equal to the Marquis himself. You must teach your wife the *branle*, and when I produce you both in Paris, all the world will flock to see you. It will make quite an era."

"Is this Lomaria so very handsome?" said Gabrielle—"did you ever hear of him, Bernard?"

"Yes—that is—no—I once saw a picture of him painted by a brother artist, but I hardly remember," replied Bernard abstractedly.

"Oh, then it could not have been like him," said Madame Collard, "he is the *very* hero of a romance—such a face, such curls, such a hand and foot—he sings like a nightingale, and has such eloquence! Ninon says he is divine, and no one disputes the fact. He will be coming into this neighbourhood soon, and you may, perhaps, see him, for he and de Seigné will stay some days at Auxerre, and my Justine's brother is his valet."

"Good God!" exclaimed Bernard, starting from his seat so suddenly as nearly to overturn the table—Gabrielle rose, too, and Madame Collard started in astonishment. Bernard complained of a violent pain in his head.

"I beg you," said he, "to forgive my abruptness, but I am sometimes taken so suddenly with this pain that I lose my self possession for the moment. It is caused by fatigue

—rest will remove it, and I shall soon be myself.”

Madame Collard uttered many exclamations of sorrow, recommended many remedies, and finally retired, leaving Bernard and his wife alone.

“ Gabrielle,” said Bernard, hastily, “ I have not dared to tell you yet that we are threatened with misfortunes which, I grieve to say, my own imprudence has brought on—can you forgive, and will you aid me ?”

“ Aid you, Bernard !” exclaimed Gabrielle becoming as pale as death but springing to his side and grasping his hand, as if she feared they should be separated : “ speak, tell me all—we have hitherto lived for happiness alone—I know sorrow must come—my heart tells me so—but I am prepared ; I can endure all, so that nothing parts us.

“ Swear never to leave me,” cried Bernard wildly ; “ swear, Gabrielle, that nothing shall tear you from me—not shame nor malice nor obloquy nor ruin. Say this and I defy my fate.”

"I swear it, my adored husband, I swear to live and die with you and for you," cried Gabrielle, clinging to him, "but why is this—why do you require an oath of that which you already know. Nothing in this world can separate my fate from yours—what has happened?—relieve my terror—tell me the worst at once."

"Before I knew you I had contracted debts which I am unable to discharge," said Bernard, speaking with difficulty, "your aunt named persons but now who are my creditors. If they find me here I am lost—I must fly instantly. Do you remain—make what story you can to your aunt to account for my absence, and in a few days I will return and take you with me—we must leave everything, so as to excite no suspicion—we will hasten from this spot, where I am not safe for a single moment."

"Why not go, this instant, Bernard?" cried Gabrielle—"why leave me behind—should you be unable to return—should anything happen to you. Oh, no—take me with you at once."



"It cannot be, my beloved," said Bernard, distractedly, "your departure would only excite suspicion too quickly. I must go to prepare a place for your reception, and return to convey my treasure to a safe retreat. Heaven shield and guard you, and avert evil from your head at least."

Bernard embraced her with passionate fondness as he spoke, caught up his cloak, and with a rapid gesture rushed from the chamber before Gabrielle could recover from her agitated surprise.

Madame Collard meantime was busy with her maid Justine, who, a pert flippant Parisian, was tossing about the articles of dress which she was unpacking with an air of vexation and scorn.

"Justine," said her mistress, "have you seen my niece's husband yet?"

"No, Madam," was the reply, "since we arrived at this vile place I've seen no creature I could look at, and think of a husband at the same time."

"Hold your peace, minion," said Madame Collard, with dignity, "answer my question. Did you see the tall, handsome stranger who came to-day here, and who is, I find, Monsieur Bernard."

"Is he handsome, madam?" asked the pert attendant. "I am sure it would be a sight worth seeking after, to meet with such a wonder in this region. Have you a message to him that I can take?"

"No, Justine," said Madame Collard, "but for once I desire you to make use of your bold eyes to some purpose, and tell me if you ever saw any one in Paris, at the hotel of Mademoiselle Ninon, like him?"

"Bless me, madam," said Justine, stopping in the act of folding a dress, "why I am quite astonished. I thought you said it was Monsieur Bernard."

"That has nothing to do with it," replied her mistress, mysteriously. "Call hither the young man Jacques, who waits."

Justine obeyed with alacrity, her curiosity

excited by the manner of her mistress, and soon returned ushering in Jacques, the serving man whose occupations about the house of Bernard were many and various.

"My good Jacques," said Madame Collard, in a patronizing tone, "have you lived here long? I want to know something about the family. What sort of a man is your master?"

"What sort?" said Jacques, rubbing his hair, "why, as to that he's of an odd sort: he's civil enough and well enough, but he makes himself obeyed pretty sharply. He's none of your quiet ones: but as for business he don't know much of that. The neighbours call him 'my lord'—he has such a presence, and somehow everyone's frightened, and nobody laughs to his face."

"He is a native of Seignelay I suppose?" asked Madame Collard.

"Bless you, no," returned Jacques, who felt his own importance as he satisfied the enquiries of his mistress's aunt: "he came

from foreign parts be sure, our *ma'amselle* disdained the natives."

"I'm not surprised at that," said Justine, with a sneer.

"Where did he come from then, and what was he?" demanded Madame Collard. "You need not say I asked these things, it is merely for my niece's good; but it is necessary I should know something of this interior, as I mean to stay some time amongst you. You have a pretty good place, Jacques, and get well paid, hey?"

"Oh there's no want of money at present," said Jacques, confidentially; "how long it 'ill last is another thing, the way they go on. As for master, he came from no one knows where, and lived no one knows how: he can sing and play on the guitar, and draw pictures of everything he sees, but as for keeping an inn, I only wish my old mistress could see how we go on!"

"An artist!" mused Madame Collard, after she had dismissed Jacques, "well I may be deceived, but it is a strange resemblance!"

“ To whom, Madam?” said Justine, inquisitively.

“ Mind your business,” was the sharp reply, “ it does not concern you.”

And so Madame Collard went to bed to dream of the Hotel de L’Enclos, and the pleasures of Paris.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TRAVELLERS.

“ Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.”

SHAKESPEARE.

THE same day that Bernard had so hastily quitted his young wife, just as the shades of evening had set in, and the inhabitants of Seignelay were preparing for rest, and closing their doors for the night, a horseman rode swiftly into the village and asked if there was any inn there which could accommodate travellers. Jacques, the factotum of the esta-

blishment of Bernard happened to be the person to whom the stranger addressed himself: on his assurances that the very best in the country could be offered, the horseman desired that chambers might be prepared and all things requisite for the entertainment of two young nobleman from Paris on their way to Auvergne, who, having missed the route to Auxerre, would be content to remain a night in this village continuing their way on the morrow.

Jacques hurried to his mistress whom he found with her aunt and informed her of what had occurred. Gabrielle heard the announcement with uneasiness: not so Madame Collard.

"How fortunate," exclaimed she, "that I should happen to be staying with you—now I dare say you feel quite scared my dear child, and could no more give orders than you could fly. You are not fit for your situation, and give me leave to say I do not think your husband much more suited to it. Pray where is he?"

“ Business obliged him to leave home suddenly, dear aunt,” replied Gabrielle, “ this is very unlucky—we never had such guests before—will you do me the great service of entertaining them—I shall be most grateful. I am not well and am so unused to strangers.”

“ Never mind, never mind, my dear,” returned her aunt. “ I see you will never make your fortune by your boldness ; this comes of a country education ; how wrong my poor dear sister was to bring you up so. But I am used to all this sort of thing and flatter myself that I shall do you credit. Come, bustle about, Justine—here Jacques see to the fires and call to the cook. It is a strange way of managing an inn for a young man to be always away—well, we must turn over a new leaf and teach you better. Here they come I declare—a handsome coach and lackyes—why what do I see ! as I live young de Sevigné and the beautiful Lomaria himself ! what an honour ! Oh, Gabrielle, you must stay, I cannot allow you

to go away with such sweet guests as these in the house. Ah! what a pity you have thrown yourself away by the marriage you have made—with your face!—but it can't be helped now."

In spite, however, of all her rhetoric, Gabrielle, trembling and uneasy, hurried away and shut herself up in her chamber while her aunt made hasty preparations to receive the unexpected guests whose arrival had thrown the whole community into confusion.

"Alas!" said Gabrielle to herself as she mused mournfully, "how unfortunate that these people should arrive! it seems as if the long quiet we have so long enjoyed were to be at once destroyed. Louis is so fond of retirement, we were so happy! I feel as if I had awakened from a blissful dream, and that in future all was to be changed, and uneasiness and disquiet would take the place of our former peace. What misfortune can it be that threatens my husband! his looks were wild and his words strange—would he would return! come what

may I will never again part with him—my path shall be his through evil, and through good, and at least we will suffer together.”

Meantime a lively recognition had taken place between Madame Collard and the newly arrived cavaliers.

“We are indeed lucky in having lost our way,” said de Sevigné, “since we have lighted on the best landlady in Paris. But how, in the name of amazement, came you here, I should as soon have expected to find Ninon herself. Heaven forbid that you have given up your *café* and intend to take a rustic husband in this lonely retreat! what shall we all do in Paris without you!”

“No fear of my forsaking you, gentlemen,” said the gratified lady, “I am here only as a matter of duty, to visit my niece, for whom I had views which are now alas at an end! It is she who keeps this inn, but as she is young and inexperienced, I do the honours for her.”

“Young?” said de Sevigné—“is she pretty?”

But I need not ask when I look at her aunt, whom she probably resembles. By all means introduce us to her—we will sup together—a pleasant party *quarrée*—what lucky fellows we are, Lomaria.”

“I fear I shall not be able to oblige you,” said Madame Collard, “for Gabrielle is a strange girl: her husband is away and she is moping in his absence like a sick bird, and refuses to be seen.”

“Husband!” said Lomaria, “is she married, then?”

“I am sorry to say, yes,” returned the aunt. “I had fixed upon a charming match for her—no other than Monsieur Dufresnoy, his majesty’s valet. The match was as good as concluded. I came here to propose it, and behold the silly girl is married to a young artist, without consulting me.”

“Are these his drawings round the room?” asked Lomaria, “he has travelled, I see—these are fine sketches; but let us have supper, since

the fair unknown is inexorable — we shall manage to pass our evening, perhaps, with your help, nevertheless.”

“ Ah, my lord,” said Madame Collard, “ why have I not the same means as at Paris, to entertain you ? I fear all here will be but sorry fare ; but we will do our best.”

“ I hope, Lomaria,” said de Sevigné, when she had left them, “ that you will be more lucky in finding a wife than poor Dufresnoy : this is the very widow he told us of, and this the girl. I must contrive to see her, in order to report to him what he has lost.”

“ You must do so early, then,” said Lomaria, “ for we will leave this wretched barn by daybreak : I am impatient to see Angelique, and dread delay. Meantime pray tell me something of the host we shall find at Mezeraye. What manner of man is Count Felix ?”

“ He is one of those men which it is impossible to know and not to like ; but he has romantic notions of love and friendship, which

unfit him for the world. For instance he is so wedded to his country wife, the heiress he was lucky enough to meet with, that since he became a husband we have never seen him in Paris. The few letters I have had from him are in a strain of morality and gravity which annoy me to death; but we must try to bring him back to what he once was when we used to pass many a gay evening with the immortal Ninon, who never grows old, and is the very goddess of delight—the only real exemplification of what eternal pleasure is. You are her last lover, Lomaria, and she has greatly distinguished you. I was so fortunate once, but she is as fickle as the summer wind, and forsook me for a newer flame. I was in despair for two days, and my mother in raptures. We returned each other's letters and tokens, and have since been the best friends in the world."

"She is alone! inimitable!" said Lomaria, "but she has one defect which will prevent her ever being happy in the midst of all the glory

that surrounds her. She has a heart—a woman in her position above all should not be possessed of so troublesome an appendage. Thank God! I have none, and am sure to go through the world well. Ninon is not selfish, and without utter and entire selfishness there is no enjoyment. She has remorse—she regrets her innocence—what weakness! none but fools are innocent, none but the weak regret. You and I are in the only true way of enjoyment, for we are careless of all but our own interest,”

“Yes,” said de Seveigné, carelessly, “nothing in my opinion is worth annoying oneself about for half an hour. I never *think*—that is the only way of getting through life—reflection is of no use, and is extremely troublesome. I have no hatreds, nor no affections. I am a true philosopher, whom nothing either irritates or enraptures.”

“Oh as for hatred—as for revenge—there I differ with you: your philosophy and mine

are different. Some of my most blissful feelings have arisen from revenge. The power of doing harm is an exquisite pleasure which I have exercised from my youth. I would not exchange some delights I have known for all I may yet have in store."

As Lomaria spoke there came on his features a strange livid expression, which almost startled his careless companion—his mouth worked—his eyes flashed fire, and he seemed for the time unconscious that he was not alone.

"Do you allude to your adventures in Brittany?" asked de Sevigné, in a sleepy tone, as if he scarcely cared for the answer.

At that moment, close to Lomaria's ear, a low deep voice uttered these words:—

"The Aire Neuve?"

Lomaria bounded from his chair, and grasped the arm of his friend.

"Did you speak?" cried he, "what words were those you uttered?" He then sunk back silently in his seat.

"I am wearied to death," said de Sevigné, languidly, "and you seem in a strange mood to-night. I can't endure to be startled, and wish you would leave off that habit of looking so tragic, as if you had seen a spectre, it is a bad style, my friend, and must be altered."

So saying, the fashionable and weary traveller rose, and bidding Lomaria good night, retired to the apartment prepared for him.

Lomaria looked round him with a shudder when he saw he was alone, then suddenly taking a lamp, hastened after his companion, with whom he was to share the primitive accommodation which the smallness of the little room alone afforded.

"Happy !" muttered he to himself as he did so—"boaster that I am—until I can banish that image, and shut my ears to that shriek, there is no happiness for me in the dark retreats of vice or the giddy scenes of dissipation.

But I will not be conquered—I will strive against it—time—time may efface all!”

The day had scarcely broken before the travellers were ready to continue their journey. Madame Collard busied herself to prepare their repast, and as she waited on them was resolved to gratify the curiosity which their journey had excited.

“And is it to Lyons that your lordships are travelling?” said she, “I have a relation there to whose hotel I can recommend you—a fine town is Lyons, but rather commercial for gentlemen like you.”

“We think of engaging ourselves in a commercial house, Madame Collard,” said de Sevigné, “for the fact is things go on so badly in Paris that trade is your only life—can you recommend us to a patron?”

“Truly, I fear you would do little credit to me if I were to do so,” returned the facetious landlady, “and Mademoiselle Ninon would never receive you again after having served in

that line—so that your fortunes would be ruined every way. People ought not to attempt what they are not fit for as I say to my niece who has an idle husband, who knows no more of inn-keeping than a baby—if I had not been here I don't know how you would have been entertained at all.”

“By the way,” said de Sevigné, “we must positively see this niece of yours, pray go and bring her down—she is as shy as a nun. We must depart directly as our journey is long and we have already lost our way once.”

Madame Collard instantly went off in search of Gabrielle, who on hearing that the guests were about to leave the cottage, at length consented to appear. She accordingly accompanied her aunt to the door as the noblemen were mounting their horses—with all the gallantry of which they were masters the two young men paid her their respects and thanked her for their entertainment, for the delicacy and grace of her manner were so superior that the words

of common place compliment which they had imagined would suffice for the pretty landlady were checked on their lips as they saw with astonishment beauty and elegance which, in spite of a retired modesty and evident timidity, they felt would not have disgraced a court.

“There is something mysterious in this,” said de Sevigné, as they rode on, “the absent husband, an artist, who knows nothing of his business—the seclusion of the loving wife—the evident mystification of our good old friend Collard—all this is a riddle which I should be amused to find out. The old lady tried hard to fathom *our* mystery, but as our people only know we are on our way to Lyons the secret is safe enough. I thought when first I saw her the spirit of ill luck had overtaken us, she is the very essence of curiosity, and never rests till she makes herself acquainted with every one’s business. I hope she will bring her pretty niece to Paris. I begin already to repent my friendly devotion to your interests, Lomaria,

this savage Velay will doubtless exceed in monotony the wilds of Brittany where I am so often condemned to vegetate."

"Oh, if you become too much *ennuyé* you can leave me on the spot to work alone," replied Lomaria, "my friendship is not of so tyrannous a nature as to desire to keep you long from Paris and its charms. Let us once ascertain that my prize is at this savage castle of Mezeraye and I am safe."

CHAPTER XII.

XARIFA.

Vaste forêt, ouvre-lui tes rameaux
Sous les grands bois la douleur endormie
En y arrivant, souvent calma ses maux.

RONDEAU ANCIENNE.

THERE was in the household of the lady of Mezeraye, in Auvergne, a young girl who filled a position somewhat equivocal, being neither a domestic nor an equal. The companion of Madeleine during her solitary hours, she was at other times almost banished her society, and left to wander about at her pleasure, with little attention paid either to her instruction or her comfort.

Her history was somewhat remarkable, and her character partook of the singularity of her fortunes. She was the child of Spanish gipsy parents, and was born in their camp, at a time when the race was in very bad repute, and their having come to fix themselves for a time near Le Puy was looked upon with vexation and fear by the whole neighbourhood. They had been ordered to depart by the civil authorities, but without avail, and it was found extremely difficult to dislodge them. The disappearance of property to considerable amount, and frequent broils between them and the peasants roused the magistrates, at last, to action and severity. A party of soldiers were sent to insist on their removal, and a violent resistance ensuing, their tents were burnt, several of them killed, and the rest fled in confusion.

Amidst the blaze of their frail habitations, the prior of the neighbouring convent of Mezeraye, who, passing the spot, interfered

humanely to prevent bloodshed, observed an infant cast on the ground and ready to become a victim to the desolating element: its mother lay dead beside it, and a boy of about eight years old was endeavouring to raise her body, as he called upon her with piercing cries.

Shocked at this spectacle and the inhumanity of the soldiers, who had seized the boy with a rude grasp, the prior commanded that he should be released, and caused the two children to be taken to the convent and carefully attended to. The grief of the boy was so intense that it was long before he would be comforted; and when, at length, his sorrow was calmed, it was succeeded by a sullen gloom which nothing could remove. His sole enjoyment seemed to be to nurse his little sister and cry over her; but he was intractable to all kindness, and the good monks found that their pupil promised to be sufficiently refractory.

They were not sorry therefore when the lady of Mezeraye, then a widow with one

daughter, Madeleine, induced by the relation of the Prior, sent for the pair with the intention of bringing them both up in her family. She was delighted with the beauty of the infant whom her brother called Xarifa, but the fierce, obstinate, and violent conduct of the boy terrified and disgusted her, and she ordered him to be forthwith carried back to the convent.

It was then that a scene ensued which no one had contemplated. The gipsy boy refused to part with his sister: he held her tightly in his arms, shrieked, cried, and overwhelmed those who tried to separate them with abuse and invective, as they gathered from his gestures, and the furious tones of the imperfections he uttered in his gipsy jargon. Actual force was necessary to take him from the child who was left with the Countess, and the enraged little champion was restored to the brethren who found him infinitely more troublesome and impracticable than ever.

One morning however to their relief, though

to the regret of the benevolent Prior, the gipsy was no where to be found, nor from that period did he return.

Xarifa, for so she continued to be called, grew up extremely beautiful, but her temper, although less violent than that of her brother, appeared sullen and vindictive, subject to bursts of passion, but not without touches of generosity and kindness. Quick in feeling, tenacious of control, readily offended, and resenting imaginary as well as real injuries with determined bitterness, she was yet affectionate and grateful for kindness, possessed sensibility, had great observation, and much genius.

In person she was rather small, but symmetrically formed, with an olive complexion, which, when animated, warmed into a rich glow. The large dark eyes were pensive when at rest, but flashed like diamonds with the least emotion. Their expression was in general calm and very peculiar, their intense gaze being so extraordinary that few could support the

steady blank, yet searching stare, which is a characteristic of her singular race. Her hair was long and luxuriant, her small teeth like pearls, and her smile, either of kindness or derision full of meaning. She was remarkable for the grace of her movements, and had a voice of great sweetness both in singing and speaking, but so deep as to be almost hollow in its tone when any strong feeling agitated her.

Notwithstanding that she had really so much beauty, her ordinary manner was so cold and almost listless that many persons pronounced her plain, and the usual paleness of her cheek and darkness of her skin, when not lighted up, gave warrant to such an assertion.

Xarifa had been made the play-thing at first, and afterwards the companion of the young Countess who was many years her senior, and had been treated as the caprice of the moment dictated, now petted, now chidden, now held in esteem for her accomplishments, now neglected for a newer favourite. Her sensibility was

shocked, her feelings outraged, her heart depressed by this sort of treatment, and when, after the Countess Madeleine's marriage, she was required to pass much of her time with the old Countess and exert herself to afford her amusement, she felt how little she was really loved for herself and how irksome was her position.

The Countess died, and Lady Madeleine became a widow after a few years of marriage, and again Xarifa was required to enliven the solitude of the castle of Mezeraye.

When she became a second time a wife, the Zingara, for so was Xarifa familiarly called, was little heeded. Felix, however, had invariably treated her with kindness and consideration when she came in his way, and more than once had interfered when he considered her treated harshly. For him she felt unmixed gratitude and respect but for her protectress every year seemed wearing out the regard which she had once known towards her.

In proportion as Felix and the Countess began to grow cool to each other, the services of Xarifa were more required, and were received with less kindness. Madeleine, unable to indulge towards her husband in the angry feelings which she could not repress, vented all her ill humour on her dependant, and would often fly from a dispute with Felix to conceal her passion and let it fall with violence on the Zingara.

She, however, endured all this with patience, for she saw that the domestic happiness so much enjoyed, was about to end ; and she pitied her mistress, and was indulgent to her infirmity of temper ; but the frequent recurrence of these scenes made her situation painful in the extreme, and she was too happy to fly from the castle to the deep solitudes of the neighbouring woods, and there indulge her tears and regrets. Her absences, however, were observed by the Countess, and commands were laid on her not to stray beyond the limits of the castle. She

felt herself a prisoner, and therefore was more than ever wretched. Her liberty had been her only enjoyment, and to be deprived of that roused all her indignation. Regardless of the orders she had received, she took every opportunity of escaping, and fled again to her beloved woods: there she would throw herself on the ground beneath the shade of some large tree, and muse and sing, and weep alone, with none but birds for her companions, and no voices but the gentle winds to answer her complaints.

She was lying one morning in her accustomed nook, her head leaning on the root of an antique elm, her form half concealed by the luxuriant leaves and flowers that grew around, and listening to the hollow sound of the autumn breeze, as it whistled amongst the branches above her. An immense prospect, as far as the eye could reach, was before her—rocks, plains, and rivers were spread as in a

map at her feet, and all was silent, as if no human creature existed in the solitude. Below she could distinguish the spires of the convent of Mezeraye, and beyond that, on an eminence, the turrets of the castle where she dwelt.

“Alas!” she said to herself, “how I envy all nature and its freedom. How I envy those gay birds which are soaring above me, they can fly wherever they desire: the whole bright sky is theirs, and none can call them back. Their homes are in the wild forest amongst the waving boughs, and when they tire of one spot they seek another climate and are always happy and at liberty. Oh! that I could hasten away too, to some distant region, where no harsh voice should tell me that my very name is a disgrace, where no tyrannical hand should drag me back to a dungeon, and while it wounded, seemed to caress me!”

She wept passionately as she spoke, and then suddenly raised her clear, loud voice, and in a wild strain poured forth these words:—

Tell me, wild winds, where do ye sleep,
I hear your voices mournful and deep ;
Tell me, oh whisper, where is your home,
Far from the fathomless depths ye come,
Waft me, oh winds, to some distant sea,
I am a captive, and ye are free !

The voice had scarcely died away, when the strain was taken up, and a tone as musical and as thrilling as her own went on with her song thus :—

“ Why should the race of the free be pent
Where tower, and bastion, and battlement,
Make a prison to keep away
The blessed light of the sunny day.
Why should the Zingara sit and sigh ?
Is she not free as the stars on high,
Free as the birds, and the winds, and sea,
Had she the will like her race to be ?”

Xarifa turned her large beaming eyes in the direction of the singer, and beheld a young man in the costume of a Spanish gipsy. The colours in his mantle, turban, sash, and sandals were of that rich, but dim hue, which showed that they were not given by a practised hand, not dyed in a city of commerce, where art

could fashion all at will, and make the rainbow pale beside the brightness of their tints. Simple hands had woven and coloured the woollen robes he wore, simple, but skilful fingers had embroidered them ; and their heavy folds were thrown together without the assistance of art, yet hung in graceful drapery over a figure of no ordinary beauty. The figure of the young man was above the common height, his features were high and regular, his forehead broad and commanding, his eyes large, with long lashes, so dark that they caused the eyes themselves to appear even larger than they were ; the expression of his face was that of profound melancholy, but as he looked upon Xarifa, the remarkable gaze peculiar to a gipsy, which appears to have the power of fascinating those who fall beneath it, might be remarked. His complexion was of a clear olive and his teeth were of brilliant whiteness.

The gipsy was gazing on Xarifa intently, and as if spell bound by his earnest glance, she rivetted her eyes upon him.

"Do you know me, Xarifa?" said he at length, "does the spirit which dwells with our race visit those who are divided from us?"

Xarifa paused a moment, started to her feet, looked fixedly at the stranger, and replied:

"There is a star which always appears to me when some great change comes over my destiny. I saw it last night, and I knew by its brightness that some event would happen which would influence my future life. You are of our race, tell me did the brother who held me in his arms till he was beaten from me, perish in childhood?"

"He did not perish," answered the stranger.

"He is before me!" cried Xarifa as with a bound she threw herself into his outstretched arms.

"Xarifa," said the gypsy as he clasped her to his bosom and looked at her with earnest fondness; "I felt sure of this. I knew that the unceasing, the unalterable attachment I had for you must be shared. Though we were

divided our sympathy still existed the same as when you clung to me as an infant, and I felt they were tearing my heart from my body when they forced you from me. I have wandered far away since the day when I left those convent walls. I found our tribe amongst the mountains: I followed them over seas and across deserts; they led me to the old haunts of our fathers, to the immortal domes of our Gods beneath the burning skies of an Eastern heaven. But even there we were persecuted—even from thence were obliged to fly. I have wandered much but my spirit has visited this spot and watched and hovered over you. You know not our faith, you know not our existence, but you are ours and we claim you. Sister will you go with us?"

Xarifa started, but recovering herself she replied:

"This is too sudden: we must see each other often: you must tell me all the secrets of the Zingaro life, and doubt not that I shall prove unworthy of my birth."



“ You are in the right,” replied the gypsy, “ I would not have you join us yet till we are in a state better to receive the daughter of the chief of our tribe. My father’s brother is an aged man, and at his death I am the head of our house, and shall be the commander of the Zingari. Then I will return and take you with me, present you to our people as their queen, and you shall reign amongst us. Tell me, beloved sister, have my forebodings been true, are you unhappy ?”

“ I am as happy, brother,” returned Xarifa, “ as one can be who is a slave.”

“ Xarifa,” replied the gypsy, his lip becoming pale, “ this shall not last. I know these dwellers in halls and towers and cities, they are tyrants ; we were not born to deal with them but for our necessities. Our race will rise again : the stars have said it, they repeat it for ever and for ever ; we shall once more be a nation, and the masters of the universe. We have endured enough and the great spirit

is appeased. Sister, our father was a mighty chief, and but for the murderers who wrought his downfall he would have restored our glories. That lot is reserved for thee and me. Farewell, and forget not that Musa, your brother Musa, loves you as dearly at this moment as on the day he held you in his childish grasp, and struggled to the last to keep you all his own."

The brother and sister parted with mutual assurances of affection, each excited and intoxicated with the fanciful hopes they encouraged, and each resolved to devote their whole energies to the furtherance of the cause they cherished.

It was no new feeling in the mind of Xarifa, although she had never before given her aspirations a name; the thought of her origin, continually forced upon her by the taunts of her companions, had haunted her mind like a dream, and she clung to the recollection of all she had heard concerning her race with enthusiastic fondness, while the story of her brother's grief



and flight was ever in her memory, and she had conjured up his form so often that his image, framed upon her own aspect, had grown familiar to her mind. She saw in Musa the transcript of herself, and her heart recognized him at once.

How cold, and dull, and sad seemed to her from that hour the castle of Mezeraye and all its splendours: how irksome its employments, how hateful its restrictions! She panted for freedom of mind and body, and each succeeding day she found herself still more a captive.

CHAPTER XIII.

MUSA.

Ye mossy founts and grass more soft than sleep,
Which the green arbutus with their spread boughs,
O'ershade.

VIRGIL.

IN a deep valley between the rocky mountains, which extend for leagues along the wide and varied district of le Velay, by the side of a small stream, whose bed was choked with large stones, over which the waters foamed and struggled for a passage, groups of wild looking men were scattered here and there, some reclining and refreshing themselves from the



brawling rivulet, with whose waters they quenched their thirst, some lying listlessly in the sun, and others watching as if for some person whom they expected anxiously. The dresses of these men were as various as their complexions, though all were dark; some however were almost black, and their features had a character which told of an eastern origin. They had a fierce, bold look, and though generally well and vigorously formed, appeared indolent in their movements, and those who were not engaged in conversation had a quiet unmoved appearance, singularly contrasting with the animation of those who spoke. Several horses and mules, lean and ill kept, were grazing near, and ragged and patched tents were carelessly pitched in different parts of the narrow valley, where they appeared to have made a halt. A number of matchlocks and swords of rather rusty exterior, were piled about, and each of the men wore in his girdle a short dagger and one or more pistols. From the tents occasionally crept forth a ragged

healthy looking child, who was recalled by one of the female denizens of the temporary habitation, who with long black locks, shading a sun-burnt, but generally fine countenance, appeared for a moment at the opening, and then was again shrouded from sight.

One of the men who sat by the stream held a guitar in his hand, on which he occasionally struck a few chords, and presently burst forth into the following :—

SONG.

Listen ! for her gentle strain
Echo whispers near ;
Listen !—hark, it wakes again
Sweeter and more clear.
Floating on the waters bright,
Sighing through a realm of flowers,
Breathing in the gale of night,
Ling'ring on uncounted hours ;
Stir not, speak not, hand in hand
Let us sit amidst the leaves
Lost in dreams of fairy land,
While new visions fancy weaves,
Not a step, a word, a sound,
Lest the fragile charm decay,
Let us on this magic ground,
Listen all our cares away !

"Ah, Lopez," said one of the men to the singer, as, the song concluded, he cast himself on the grass in a listless attitude, "is that one of the songs that charmed the ladies of Paris, and won the hearts of the Princesses?"

Lopez, who was singularly handsome, laughed as he replied, "It may be so, for they scarce knew how to reward us sufficiently, nor did our welcome end at Versailles, for we had messages to visit several of them in their hotels in Paris. These Gentile women crave strangely to know their fate, and catch eagerly at every chance of gaining information on that concealed subject."

"Did you satisfy any of them on the subject," asked his companion.

"I would not reject their gifts," returned Lopez, "though you know I have not the secret knowledge which belongs to few of us. To Musa it is given, but he is too proud to indulge these childish women who are satisfied with the lies retailed by la Vigoureux."

"Does the confederacy of Les Amis prosper?" questioned one of the band.

"It does," replied Lopez, "but our chief does not approve of it, and ordered us away as soon as he found how they proceeded. His notions are too high for the ways of the world, but he tells us there is a great fortune in store for us, and as he can read the stars, we trust him. Besides, I for one, hate cities and their noise—the fields and forests suit me best—to lie like this beside a flowing stream and dream away life, is better than breathing heavy air in a close street, with the fear of the police ever before you. Les Amis are going on well, but they aim at too much, and will be found out at last. I was not sorry that Musa refused to stay longer, and here we all are safe once more, and wandering in the open plains and mountains, with music and free air. Here we may freely sing with echo for our chorus—though this is not my native Granada, yet it has its charms." Again he touched his lute and sung.



THE MOOR OF GRANADA.

I keep the key, tho' banish'd
From blest Granada long,
Our glorious race has vanished,
Or lives alone in song ;
Tho' strangers in Alhambra
May idly musing gaze,
On all the dying splendours
That round her ruins blaze.
Those tow'rs had once a home for me,
And still I keep the sacred key. †

Alas ! my eye may never
That lovely land behold,
Where many a gentle river
Flows over sands of gold :
The sparkling waves of Darro,
For me may flow in vain,
No Moorish foot may wander
In lost, but cherish'd Spain !
Yet once her walls had room for me,
And still I keep the sacred key.

There often comes in slumber,
A vision sad and clear,
When through Elvira's portals
Abdalla's hosts appear,
The keys of lost Granada
To other hands are given,

† Alluding to the tradition that the banished Moors of Granada always retain the keys of their former habitations, hoping yet to return.

And all the pow'r of ages
One fatal hour has riven !
No name—no home—remain for me,
But still I keep the sacred key !”

“ You cannot forget your old fancies, Lopez,” said his friend, “ and are still as fond of the ballads that please us as well as ever. But tell us, has Musa spoken of his sister, are we to have her for our queen ?”

“ He has so promised,” replied Lopez, “ and he will keep his word. Would he were come ! He cannot delay long methinks, since he knows now that his uncle is dead, and there is no longer an objection to his being our Count. The hour is at hand, and he knows the country well, new as it is to some of us. He is a gallant youth, and our star seems to rise.”

“ He has then, it seems, abandoned his pursuit of that silly girl, which brought him into disfavour with the old chief ?” enquired one amongst the party.

“ So he says, and his word is truth,”

answered he who had first spoken. It was a weakness, and he paid for it by being banished from our tribe; but the whim is over, or he has lost the prize for which he risked our enmity, and lost his rank amongst us."

"Small thanks to him then for returning," said the second speaker, "if he could have gained her he would have deserted us."

"We are none of us perfect," remarked one of the group, "as long as none of these white skinned natives of the soil are intruded upon us, any one of our community has a right to amuse himself with them, and when he is tired of the folly there is no reason why he should not be welcomed back. Since to injure all who are not of us is our creed, the more harm done the better."

"True," said another, "Musa has just stopped short in time; but he would have married the girl."

"And if he had," returned the other, "when he deserted her all would have been right again, and we none the worse."

A laugh followed this remark, which was followed by conversation concerning their chief, his travels, and his knowledge. From this each of the party was led to recitals of his own experience in foreign lands, and the marvels he had seen ; and in true eastern fashion as they grouped themselves in listening attitude, one after another they recounted histories, which were heard with avidity by the assembly.

One dark-browed man, who had passed many years in India, pointed out similarities in the appearance of the spot where they were then met to a famous rock, which was familiar to him in that far off clime.

“ I know not,” said he, “ what marvels may not attach to this wild rocky country, but it is too like that I have seen not to have been the abode of spirits. I should almost think I was sitting by the banks of the Nerbudda, and that this fire stained rock was that of the evil spirit Onkar Mundattab.”

“ Tell us what that means,” cried several

of the band, "was there an evil one who had power? Did you see it? What wonders can you relate. Sit close, comrades, our brother will help to wile away the time with some history of what he has heard in distant countries."

The traveller, proud of the attention he had secured, did not long hesitate to comply with the wishes of his indolent friends, and as they lay reclined around him, their dark eyes flashing as they listened, he recounted to them the following tale :—

THE ROCK OF THE VALLEY OF FLOWERS.

"Such is our fate! This day and the morrow, and the morning after are pledges in the hand of destiny for events of which we have no knowledge."

ANROO. Prince of the Moallakat.

BETWEEN the lofty mountains of the Vindya range and those of Mokundra, in the most fertile and beautiful part of Central India, lies the Nerbudda. At its utmost extremity frowns the awful rock of Onkar Mundattah. This dark and stupendous mass hangs suspended over the river which here, interrupted by huge fragments of rugged stone, scattered in confused heaps, foams and leaps, chafing with continual fury, and making the yawning caverns round ring with its thundering murmurs.

Black and steep the giant rock offers a surface stained with muddy streaks, as of blood, produced by the former action of fire, when in an age long since past, the pent up flames sleeping in its bosom burst forth with irresistible force, and poured floods of boiling lava down its sides.

The inhabitants of this part of the country regarded the spot with terror, from its being considered the abode of a powerful evil spirit, from whence its name was derived, and whom, at distant periods, it was thought necessary to propitiate by the sacrifice of a human victim, who was compelled to leap from the rock, a height of one hundred and twenty feet, into the foaming abyss below.

Immediately beneath the spirit's rock spread out a grassy plain, covered at some seasons with beautiful and many-coloured flowers: soft rivulets glided through it shaded with tamarind; the golden and fragrant champa enlivened their borders; hedges of the crimson cactus, inter-

mingled with the khooja's white, rose-shaped blossoms, divided the meadows; the scarlet pomegranate blushed amidst its bright leaves, and the date and mango waved their graceful heads in the breeze. Beyond, the view was closed by the dark foliage of eternal woods. The breeze was balmy with the perfume of the baubool and other fragrant trees, and a sparkling fountain, bursting from a rock, cast its waters into a well beneath, refreshing and enlivening the spot which was often resorted to by groups of men and women, who would there recline, listening to the tales of some venerable man, whose experienced mind had stored up the knowledge of the past. On one of these occasions a company were there assembled, whilst an aged friend recounted, as he pointed with his upraised hand to the rock of Onkar Mundattah, the history of Narayan the Pure.

The mother of Narayan was the wife of Hemaja, a Mahratta chief; she was extremely beautiful, and possessed the devoted love of her

husband. She was perfect in all accomplishments belonging to her sex, and particularly excelled in that which was held in high esteem by her countrywomen, namely the management of the fiery courser on which she frequently accompanied Hemaja to the chase, and on many of his expeditions. The riches of the country were lavishly expended to adorn her person, already sufficiently embellished by nature, and her virtues won from all affection and admiration; yet, in spite of every advantage, of every means of enjoyment that surrounded her, she was wretched.

Three years had elapsed since her marriage and she had no child. The disappointment and disgrace attached to this circumstance preyed on her mind, and embittered every hour; in vain her husband strove to banish the unceasing regret which drove the roses from her cheek and dimmed the radiance of her eyes; if she concealed from Hemaja her sorrow she indulged it in secret. He was called from her at this

period by the imperious voice of war, and during his absence she retired from society, and lamented her misfortune with uncontroled grief.

It was at the close of a sultry day, when the fresh breeze invited to wander along the lovely banks of the Nerbudda, that her favourite attendant persuaded her to seek refreshment, if not amusement by its side. As she strolled along a crowd of mournful images presented themselves to her mind:

"Alas," she sighed, "yon lotus, reclining its drooping head on the waves that sustain it may perish before another sun shall rise, but, beside it, ready to burst its fragile bonds, is a young bud in whose fragrant beauty it will be renewed; but, when I am cold in the sleep of eternity where will be the sweet flower that should renew to Hemaja the image of his ill-fated Alya! Oh that my prayers might move heaven! Oh! that my supplications could gain the object of so many hitherto fruitless vows!"

While she spoke with passionate earnestness, her eyes upturned and her hands clasped, suddenly descending slowly from the rock of Onkar Mundattah, near which unwittingly she had approached, she observed the figure of a majestic looking man, who, advancing to where she stood, remained immoveable before her, with his arms folded on his breast, and his eyes fixed on her with intent expression.

Alya started, and would have turned to retrace her steps, but found herself unable to do so: a singular fascination kept her still gazing on the stranger, who said, in a calm voice—

“ Daughter fly me not: why should a *charun** of the sacred order inspire fear in thy bosom? It may be that I have power to comfort thee. There is sorrow on thy brow, and thy face is like the water lily veiled in the dew of tears; but the waters, though they may rise high,

* Priest.

cannot overpower the lotus; nor should grief be allowed to drown thy heart. Tell me thy cause of mourning and, if it may be, consolation shall not be withheld from thee."

Alya was re-assured by the mildness of the sage's manner, although startled at first by the peculiar expression of his eyes, which were large, bright, and seemed to fill his visage with their overwhelming lustre, like those of an eagle, when regarding his prey; and as she recollected that he belonged to the revered order of priests whom every Brahmin is bound to regard with respect, answered with much simplicity, and with renewed tears, related to him the cause of her distress. After having consoled her mind by discourse drawn from sources to which, in his holy capacity, he had access, he concluded with these words—"Return home, fair daughter, and doubt not that thy vows will be accomplished. I will add my intercession to thine. On this day twelvemonth return to this spot, on the banks of the Ner-budda, and I will claim from thee a reward."

His disappearance after he had spoken these words was as sudden as his apparition had been, and, with an involuntary shudder, Alya turned to her attendant, who had remained at a little distance.

"Alas, dear mistress," said she, "I grieve that you have held converse with an unknown personage, and so near the fearful rock of Onkar."

"It matters not, maiden," answered Alya, endeavouring to conceal her emotion, "this was a sacred *charun*, a priest of Brahma, the Divine, and whatever spot he treads on must be blest."

"But know you not, lady," replied the maiden, whose fears conjured up dangers which her fancy exaggerated, "know you not that evil spirits sometimes assume forms which belong not to them, the better to deceive?"

"No more," said Alya, "his words were those of peace, and inspired hope in my heart, which has long been banished thence: let us

hasten homewards for I see the moon has spread a net of beams over the pomegranate groves, and I am faint and weary, not with fatigue but care."

A year had passed—smiles were bright on the cheek of Alya and in the eyes of her husband, as they looked with delight on the lovely infant which Heaven had granted to their prayers. They were never weary of caressing the little Narayan, and of comparing him to all that existed most precious and most beautiful on earth. The hearts of the parents were filled

with gratitude, and they blest the holy man whose intercession had brought them happiness.

The day came round on which Alya had beheld her benefactor, and Hemaja and his wife repaired with their child to the banks of the Nerbudda. A train of attendants bore rich and splendid offerings to be presented to their benefactor, and they advanced singing gaily and elate with joy and gladness.

SONG.

See the nodding cypress nigh
Waves its thick, embroidered leaves ;
While the perfumed jasmines sigh,
And their breath the breeze receives :
See the wild deer stands to gaze,
And the peacock's feathers glow ;
See the water's glass displays
Stooping cranes with wings of snow.
Nature's face is full of glee,
Birds and flowers have joined our mirth,
Nature is as blest as we,
All is joy in heaven and earth !

The bright, clear moon rose and threw her brilliant light over the river, the groves, and

the dark rock of Onkar Mundattah, as the joyous party approached, when, descending suddenly from the height, appeared the form of him they sought. He advanced with a majestic step, his large eyes gleaming through the shadows round, and stood motionless for a few seconds, inspiring in all who gazed on him involuntary awe. Hemaja broke the silence.

"We come," said he—"oh, beneficent Being, to render our thanks for our present happiness, and we pray thee to receive the humble offerings which we bring as tokens of our gratitude."

The *charun* smiled, and waving his hand answered, "I said that I would claim my own reward: it was, therefore, needless to prepare those gifts for which one like me has no use. "Let Alya and her infant approach."

The mother stepped forward with her child pressed to her bosom, and with a lowly inclination bent forward, while the holy man breathed a few words in her ear. She became pale as

marble as he spoke, then uttered a faint scream, and turning with frantic gestures to her husband, gave to his arms the weeping infant, and fell senseless to the ground.

When Hemaja looked up from the prostrate form of his unfortunate wife, the mysterious stranger was gone, and none could tell how he had disappeared. It was in vain that he entreated an explanation of the extraordinary scene he had witnessed. Alya preserved an impenetrable secrecy on the subject.

"Let me," said she, "bear the weight of my misfortune alone: my own imprudence is the cause of what I suffer; thy days shall not be embittered by the knowledge of an evil which will arrive but too soon!"

"Does ought threaten our child?" exclaimed the terrified father. Alya replied only by agonized floods of tears, but he could not obtain from her any information.

Young Narayan, or the Pure, as they had named him, was such a being as poets describe

Chrisna, the deity of love, to be. At an early age he had a martial step, an erect and bold carriage, a strength of body and intellect that appeared extraordinary. Nothing escaped his observation ; whether calculated to excite enthusiasm, pity, or ridicule, his answers were always ready, his remarks always correct and original. His dark, sparkling eye ever in motion, his changeable cheek and expressive lip, his raven hair, which curled from his high forehead, displaying its bold expanse, all in him bespoke a creation of no common mould ; while his energy and courage, his sensibility and tenderness beautifully contrasted, made him the delight of even indifferent observers, and the idol of his parents.

While Narayan was still in the bloom of his infancy, an event occurred destined to throw a still deeper cloud of grief over the already suffering mind of Alya. Hemaja fell in battle at the head of his brave troops, and at the moment of victory. Instead of sacrificing

herself on the funeral pile of her husband Alya, whose soul was bound up in the existence of her son, and whose blighted affections rested in the grave of Hemaja, hesitated not to take the prescribed vows of seclusion and celibacy, and retired from the world which she had adorned to a solitary abode in the most secluded part of the valley of the Nerbudda. Far in the distance rose to the skies the inaccessible peaks of the snowy Himmalaya, and along the extensive landscape rolled several broad rivers which, hurrying onwards through a fertile country, joined their great parent, the majestic Jumna.

A forest, in which the stupendous banian, with its thousand columns, itself a forest, was pre-eminent, skirted the rising ground, on which stood the habitation of the solitary widow of Hemaja. Here she passed her days in devotion and instructing her son, who grew up in this retreat everything that her fondest wishes could desire; but instead of her grief

becoming softened by time, each returning year, as it added new vigour to the youthful Narayan, seemed but a signal for the renewal of her wretchedness.

He had attained his eighteenth summer, and the recurrence of the day of his birth had been the occasion of more poignant grief than his mother had ever before shown, unhappy as he had always known her to be. Hurt, as well as deeply affected by her sorrow, of which he was evidently the cause, Narayan, at early dawn, sought his accustomed haunts in the forest, and strove to lose the remembrance of the sad home he left behind.

It was not, however, in the chase that he sought temporary oblivion of his care, though his bow was slung across his shoulders, and his quiver was filled with pointed arrows, though his javelin was keen, and the dagger was hanging at his girdle : he had long sought the forest with such occupation in view, but of late one far more interesting had lured him to

its recesses. He stopped beneath the shade of a palmyra, and gazing amongst its branches, uttered these words:—"Come, thou faithful companion of Narayan, leave thy guarded nest, filled with its pearls, which the fire fly illumines with her rays, come, gentle Baya,* to him who seeks the abode of his beloved! Her bright eyed gazelle will welcome us, and the cloud

* The Baya, or Indian Grosbeak, is very common in Hindostan: it generally builds in the highest trees, particularly the Palmyra or Indian fig, and prefers a tree which hangs over a rivulet. His nest is long, like a bottle, with the entrance downwards, to guard it from birds of prey. The popular belief is that he lights his nest with fire flies: he may be taught to fetch and carry. The young Hindoo women at Benares and other places wear very thin plates of gold, called *ticas*, slightly fixed, by way of ornament, between the eyebrows, and as they pass through the streets the youthful exquisites, who amuse themselves with training Bayas, give them a signal which they understand, and send them to pluck the pieces of gold from their mistress's foreheads, which they bring in triumph to their admirers. The Baya can be taught to fly with amazing celerity, and when a ring is dropped over a deep well they catch the ring before it reaches the water. Their eggs are like large pearls: when many are assembled in one tree they make a lively din, rather resembling chirping than singing. They are possessed of wonderful sagacity.

Asiatic Researches. HAMILTON.

shall pass from my brow, at least for awhile, as I behold her who is my morning star."

At the sound of his voice a soft chirping was heard, and suddenly, from a high branch, descended the bird to whom Narayan's apostrophe had been addressed: it perched upon his wrist and looked into his face with bright speaking eyes as it clapped its wings as if with pleasure.

Narayan smoothed its plumage, and regarded it with fondness, as he continued his way till he reached the gate of a rustic dwelling, where as if awaiting his approach, a tame gazelle was gazing in the direction in which he advanced. Its breast was as white as snow, and the tender brown of its back and shoulders was intersected by delicate white lines; the feet of this pretty animal were like small flowers, its slender legs like bending reeds, as with graceful bound it approached Narayan.

The Baya flew towards her companion with demonstrations of delight, and the young lover entered the garden.

“Where is thy mistress, dear gazelle?” said he, “heard she not Narayan’s step in the forest or his voice at her gate so readily as thou?”

Speaking thus in a tone of tenderness which contradicted the implied reproach, he made a few steps towards the dwelling, when a fairy form rushed forth with hair dishevelled and wild gestures, and throwing herself into the outstretched arms of Narayan, exclaimed in piercing accents.

“Oh my friend—my only friend! He is dead—the good, the beloved, the generous old man is no more, and Abba is desolate and alone!”

“Is it possible!” cried Narayan turning very pale, “but two days since I saw him well and happy. What sudden blow is this?”

“Alas!” answered Abba, “last night he sat by my side while I repeated to him the songs of the divine loves of Radha and Madhava,*

* Poems of the Mallakat.

which he delighted to hear, when suddenly he fell to the ground, from that time reason never returned to his mind, and this fatal moment he expired in my arms! Woe to me! my mother died before she had power to bless her new born infant, my father fell in battle—this faithful friend protected me, and now where can I look for aid!”

“ Here, beloved Abba, in these arms, in this devoted heart!” answered Narayan passionately, “ come with me to the abode of my mother; let us tell her our affection and thy misfortune. She lives but for her son; she has loved like us and will receive thee as a daughter.”

The same day saw Abba in the dwelling of Alya, cherished, caressed, and comforted; but the sadness on the brow of the unfortunate mother grew darker as she heard the story of their love, and she started in agony which she could not conceal when her son demanded her permission to make Abba his bride.

“My children,” she exclaimed at length, while the paleness of the grave seemed spread over her features, “there wanted but this to render my misery complete—you cannot be united! the fatal destiny which has marked my son even before my birth, makes all prospect of enjoyment vain, all hope of happiness a shadow. Hear me, and judge of my despair—while I am the oracle of your fate. Narayan is fore-doomed to be a sacrifice to Onkar Munnattah!”

A shriek from Abla spoke the horror with which she heard the sentence, and the wild cry of Narayan as he cast himself prostrate on the earth showed the depth of despair to which this dreadful annunciation had reduced him.

“Oh, mother! mother!” he cried, “why hast thou kept the fatal secret from me? Why did I behold Abla but to lose her? Why saw I the light of day but to know the horrors of the night, which must be mine?”

“Is there no remedy?—may not another

sacrifice be accepted?—cannot I die for him?” exclaimed Abla, with sudden fervour.

“Think you, maiden,” said Alya, “if any substitute might be offered, that his mother would not, long ere this, have leaped from the rock of Onkar into the abyss which yawns for its victim. Think you that years would have rolled on and brought this day, which comes loaded with despair, if an act of mine could have averted the evil! No—he must die—the spirit of that dreadful rock was he, who, under a sacred form, deceived me—’twas he who granted my presumptuous entreaty, when I dared to murmur at the decrees of Brahma—it was that fearful spirit who claimed his reward, when in our joy we bore one son to the banks of the Nerbudda. That reward! Oh, it was indeed claimed that fatal hour—the words of the evil one have rung for ever in my ears. Narayan is mine from his birth. When eighteen summers have rolled over his head he must take the leap of death from the rock of

Onkar Mundattah !” I have lived to see the moment, but I lingered only to perish with him ; here, in this solitude, I nursed his infancy, I tended his youth, and deemed no tie could bind him to earth, but that which death itself could not sever. Alas ! doubly bitter is our fate ! for now the world is dear to him for Aba’s sake : now he will mourn that one heart is left to sorrow for his untimely fate !”

“ No, no,” cried Aba, clinging to her love, “ we can die at least together—the evil spirit will not reject another victim, we may be united even yet, though it be but thus, and may Onkar Mundattah be appeased for ever !”

A few days only had passed since this sad interview and the sound of melancholy music echoed through the vale of Nerbudda : the crowds assembled on the banks of the river wore no looks of gladness such as usually enlivened their meetings. There was a deathlike stillness around, interrupted only by the songs of lament which accompanied a car drawn by

white oxen, in which two females were seated of either side of a young chief clad in splendid garments, but on whose brow sat a deep sadness which showed him to be an object of commiseration, rather than, as his situation would denote, a bridegroom, beloved and happy. Yet Narayan was a bridegroom, and none so well beloved, so fondly cherished. Abba, his new-made bride, and Alya his mother, were attending him, from the marriage ceremony, which had just taken place, to his destined and inevitable fate. As the car approached the fatal rock, the lamentations became loud, and cries and shrieks were heard from the multitude assembled. The women cast themselves on the ground, tearing their hair and rending their garments. Already the mournful cavalcade had reached the foot of the mountain, the ascent was begun, and the song of grief which had accompanied them throughout their progress was loudly renewed—

The vulture has chosen the ringdove's nest—
Mourn for the bridal where death is a guest !
No strains of joy shall ring thro' the air,
But the yells and the wailings of wild despair.
See, where dimly the Dhakeens* hover
Over the bride and her fated lover ;
They come in storm on the wings of the blast,
And their tiger steeds through the air speed fast.
O'er Onkar's rock in triumph they ride—
Mourn for the bridegroom, mourn for the bride !

On a sudden the car paused and Narayan rose
—he waved his hand and the sound died away
in sorrowful murmurs.

“ My countrymen,” he said, “ lament not for
me, I but fulfil the decrees of destiny, which
cannot be changed. To you I leave my wife—
my mother—let them find friends in all to
whom the memory of heroes is dear.”

As he uttered these words, with the swift-
ness of light he had leaped from the car—his
fleet step had scaled the steep, and before the

* The Dhakeens are evil spirits, or witches, seen at certain periods with glaring eyes and dishevelled hair, riding at night on tigers and other wild beasts. See Sir J. Malcolm's Central India for this and other allusions in the story.

astonished crowd could be aware, or *Abla* and his mother follow him even with a look, he had reached the verge of the fatal rock.

He threw his arms wildly upwards towards Heaven, and rushing forwards with determined resolve, plunged into the abyss of space.

A wild and terrified shout proclaimed that the sacrifice was accomplished. *Abla* and the distracted mother rent the air with their cries, as they struggled vainly with those who forcibly detained them from executing the purpose they had conceived of dying with him they loved.

Suddenly, to the amazement of all, there arose as if from a great distance beneath, strains of soft music, and in the sight of all, bright clouds of golden hue gathered fast round the peak of the dreadful rock.

All hurried forward, eager to discover the meaning of the phenomena. Those in whose grasp *Abla* was striving relaxed their hold for a moment, and with a sudden effort she escaped

them, then darting away like a sunbeam she fled till her foot was on the edge of the precipice.

What voice arrested her step! what sound bewildered and enraptured her senses! what melody from another world came to restore her to life and love! It was the voice of Narayan.

“Abla—my beloved!” he cried, “forbear, forbear—look down the deep abyss and behold me uninjured—bless the hand of fate and the decree of Brahma—I am saved for thee, and for my country.”

Abla bent forward—scarcely could her sight reach the depths where she beheld her husband like a speck below, though his voice had sounded as if close to her ear. “He lives—he lives!” she exclaimed, “Brahmins behold your chief—proclaim your Rajah!”

Instantly from every tongue burst forth the shout of exultation—awed and amazed, the people crowded to the spot, every eye was

strained to look upon the rescued victim. The air rung with the cry of "Narayan! long live the pure one whom Brahma has preserved from the evil spirit. Long live our destined Rajah!"

Such was in effect, the established law, that he who having taken the perilous leap was yet preserved, should become sovereign of the country; though none of the numerous victims who had been sacrificed to appease the wrath of Onkar Mundattah, had ever, during the course of many years been known to escape. When such an event did occur the spell was to be broken, and the evil one was to quit the rock.

The joyous exclamations of the people were interrupted by a sudden darkness, which spread over the spot, from the midst of which ascended an indistinct object which the fancy of each who gazed on it shaped into some singular form. One conceived it to be a huge bird with four wings outspread, the body having something human in its appearance. Others thought it like a vulture with an enormous length of neck,

which a luminous line surrounded: the feathers of its wide wings were blood red, and its crooked beak shone like steel. Slowly and dimly it soared aloft, till it was entirely lost to sight, the clouds dispersed, light again broke through the heavens, again was heard the soft melody of voices from unseen lips, and in the midst of a shower of rosebuds and many-coloured blossoms which the gentle wind wafted round in a canopy above his head, Narayan appeared, borne on the air, to the top of the rock, where his mother received him in her arms, while Abba embraced his feet, and his subjects hailed him as their future sovereign.

The name of the height was from that time changed to the Rock of the Valley of Flowers, and its colour from that period became of a sunny white, though, before, its dark and dismal hue had scared from its vicinity the wanderer in the Valley of the Nerbudda.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SECOND GIPSY'S STORY.

" Can these things be,
And overcome us like a summer cloud,
Without our special wonder?"

SHAKESPEARE.

" THESE things are very strange," said one of the gipsies, as the party remained awe stricken, when the traveller's tale was concluded, " and sights as wonderful are sometimes seen in our own country. I have myself had a glimpse of the phantom Hellequin and his sons in my native forests, in Normandy, and if you please I will tell you his history, it is not a little curious."

No objection being raised to this proposition, the Norman went on to relate the following legend:—

THE FOREST PHANTOMS.

“ Adonc luy souvint de la mesgnie de Hellequin dont il avoit autre fois ouy parler.”

Histoire de Richard sans Peur.

RICHARD THE FEARLESS, the bravest knight in Christendom, and the most renowned Duke of Normandy, was one day out riding in a somewhat lonely part of the country, in the neighbourhood of Rouen, and just as the shades of evening were beginning to gather, entered a covered way formed by rocks of fantastic shapes and the thick branches of trees. He had not advanced far when he was aware that a little in advance of him rode three knights, one of whom was winding his hunting horn as they hurried on at a brisk pace, and presently disappeared in the forest before them. Duke

Richard was much astonished that any persons should venture to hunt in his dominions without permission, and, spurring his steed, he followed the path they had taken. Guided by the sound of the horn he soon came up with them, and calling in a loud voice he asked by what right they took their pastime in the forest. Instead of returning him an answer they all three wheeled their horses round, and stood in a row, barring his passage. He observed that they were each accoutred in a suit of black armour, and wore plumes of the same hue; their scarfs were black, as were their shields, which bore no devices that Richard could perceive. Riding up to them he exclaimed—"Discourteous knights! is it not enough that you presume to disport yourselves in my forest without leave, but you must refuse to explain your conduct, and present a hostile appearance when I question you."

Instead of replying to this address, the black knights couched their lances, and altogether

rushed at Duke Richard, who had scarcely time to draw his sword and stand on the defensive.

"Cowards!" cried he, "do you think to take me at disadvantage? I am, you shall find, prepared."

So saying, he urged his horse forward quickly enough to avoid their thrusts, and darted so suddenly between them that he succeeded in hurling one of his opponents from his saddle. The other two, recovering their ground, returned to the attack, one of whom was presently disarmed by the Duke and struck to the earth. Disdaining to take his life he permitted him to remount his horse, when all three knights took to flight at full speed.

Richard, heated with the combat, and enraged at their impertinence and cowardice, pursued them for some time, and although his own steed was an excellent one, he could not but be struck with the superior swiftness displayed by the fugitives, who seemed to cleave the air as they rode, and were out of sight in

an instant. As he gazed forward in the hope of perceiving them, his course was arrested by a sight which in the midst of the thick and solitary wood filled him with wonder.

A group of persons of both sexes were assembled beneath the trees in an open glade, and were dancing with great animation, but without music, and totally silent. They became immediately aware of his presence and discontinued their dance to salute him.

He returned their courtesy, and coming close up to them, looked at them with much curiosity. The females were very beautiful, with bright eyes, that had a strange expression, which he could not define: they were pale and grave, and he experienced no pleasure as he regarded their beauty. Their figures were delicate in the extreme, and all their motions full of grace; but while he gazed on them they seemed to melt away from his view, and re-appear at a little distance.

Suddenly he recollected that the forest was

filled with wonders, and felt convinced, although this was the first time, he had ever come in contact with the renowned shadows that he saw before him, *the family of Hellequin*, a race of phantoms who were known to haunt the glades of the forest, and occasionally appeared to travellers in the evening.

He felt a sentiment of respect mingled with pity, as he contemplated the majesty of their demeanour, and the melancholy, yet resigned, expression of their countenances.

“Forgive me,” he said involuntarily, “for having intruded on your pastime.”

As soon as he had spoken, one of the men advanced from the group, and, approaching, bade him welcome. The voice struck him as familiar, and he immediately recognised a squire of his household who had died, and whom he had seen buried about a year before.

“How, Amyot!”—exclaimed he—“what power restored you again to life?”

“I am not living,” answered the Squire,

"the apparent body on which you look is but an empty shade. For the sins committed in my earthly career I am doomed to join the family of Hellequin, and with them wander in company with many other spirits till the time of our probation is concluded. We hunt in the forest as was our wont when alive, and dance as we formerly did by twilight and the light of the moon, under the shadow of the high trees whose leaves chequer the bright turf beneath our feet."

"Since you inhabit the forest," said the undaunted Knight, "guide me to the resting-place of three cowardly fugitives whom I am vainly endeavouring to overtake."

"Follow me," answered the seeming Squire, "and I will show you him whom you believed you had hurled from his seat."

"Whom I believed!" said Richard, "what mean you? I tell you I did so, without any doubt of the fact."

The Squire smiled and led the way to a spot

where, beneath a hawthorn, lay one of the Knights with whom Duke Richard had lately been engaged. He rose at his approach, and the fearless warrior once more demanded an explanation of his presumption.

"Know you not," said he, "that this forest is reserved exclusively for my pleasure?"

"He who disposes of you and your possessions," replied the black knight solemnly, "granted me permission to hunt here, nor am I or mine accountable to you."

At these words Richard, unable to restrain his anger longer, rushed upon him, but his surprise was great when he found that he held nothing in his grasp, though the Knight was within a few paces of him, but removed to another spot he beheld him standing with Amyot, and both were smiling at his dilemma. All the troop, who had been dancing, had also come up and, whereas before they all looked awfully serious, each now stood apparently enjoying the scene, and smiling like the others."

“ Enough, Duke Richard,” at length said the impalpable Knight. Let your astonishment cease, and marvel not that you have been foiled in your attempt : I am Hellequin ! The two huntsmen whom you encountered with me are my sons. Our arms as well as ourselves are shadows, and we are not capable of receiving wounds ; nevertheless, we are agitated with the same passions as formerly, are induced by our love of war to attack and defend ourselves ; are moved by fear, pride, and anger : all which feelings are but transient, and pass away like the reflection of the moon in the waters of yonder fountain. Sit down beside its sparkling wave and I will relate to you the history of my unfortunate life.

Hellequin lived in the time of that famous monarch who acquired the name of Charles Martel, from the prowess he displayed against the Saracens, whom his mighty blows, like the strokes of a *hammer*, crushed before him. Hellequin’s fame was little less than that of the

King ; his deeds were a terror to the enemies of the Christian faith, and Normandy became illustrious through him. His family was numerous and all distinguished for their bravery and beauty, and the services which they had rendered their royal master made him look on them as the very bulwark of his kingdom. At the time when Charles was occupied in the conquest of Germany the Saracens entered France. By command of the monarch, Hellequin raised troops and, to do so effectually, he was obliged to sacrifice all his possessions. His land was sold to procure supplies, for he would reserve nothing to himself when the welfare of his country demanded his aid.

Thus devoted to the public good his actions became the theme of all the minstrels of the age, and the fame of his great name resounded through the kingdom.

Charles Martel took the directions of the army himself, but a command of importance was given to Hellequin. He left his family in

the only castle he could now call his own, and led on his troops against the Saracens, who were discomfited and driven back with great slaughter.

The King returned to his capital, leaving the entire command with Hellequin, who, though he would willingly have once more embraced his wife and children, could not reject so great an honour. Alas ! his castle was surprised and his family obliged to fly, while he led his troops against the infidels, and, in a desperate engagement, an arrow pierced one of his eyes, and he fell covered with wounds. He was borne, apparently lifeless, from the field, to the great grief of the king, who extolled his deeds to the skies and ordered every possible care to be paid him.

While he lay suffering from his frightful wounds a decisive battle took place ; the army of Charles were victors, and the enemy expelled. All the spoil, which was considerable, was divided amongst those who were last engaged.

Peace ensued, and the unfortunate knight, on his recovery, found himself partially blind and utterly destitute, and obliged to return to his ruined family without a chance of assisting them. However, he relied on the goodness of the King, and requested that some compensation might be granted him for his long services. This demand was considered as perfectly just, and a considerable pension awarded as his due; he was, in the meanwhile, forced to raise money till the first year's income was in his power. When the term arrived he applied to the treasury and received for answer a representation of the distressed state of the finances, which, exhausted by the disastrous war, entirely prevented all promises being kept.

Hellequin submitted in silence, returned to Normandy, bewailed his fate but reproached no one. His creditors were not so resigned: finding that there was no chance of payment, they seized on his person and on his wife and children, whom they thus prevented from using

exertions which would not have been spared, and together they were cast, pitilessly into a dungeon.

It was then that the patience of the unfortunate Hellequin began to give way. Overpowered, at first, with this accumulation of misery, he abandoned himself to despair. His wife, however, resolved to make some effort to procure the means of escape, and by urgent entreaties and representations, softened his jailors sufficiently to obtain permission to leave the prison occasionally, in order, by begging, to gain a scanty support for herself and her suffering family. This permission was granted her, only, however, on condition, that she should abandon to the creditors of her husband all her claims on the property which was hers by virtue of her marriage dower.

What was now left her! She used the utmost ingenuity, and contrived at different times to introduce arms into the prison, until she had provided sufficient means to enable her husband

and sons to make a desperate attempt to regain their liberty.

Accordingly one night, when from the apparent dejection and apathy of their prisoners, their jailors were off their guard, Hellequin and all his party, male and female, entirely armed, made a sudden sortie, forced the guard, slew several of them, and effected their escape from the prison of Rouen.

Their intention was to spread themselves over the country, and support their existence by the labour of their hands. They concealed themselves in a wood and for a time breathed at liberty, but they began to feel the pressure of poverty, and found the difficulty of obtaining employment much greater than they had imagined. The wife and daughters of Hellequin, therefore, resolved to venture into the town, conceiving that, if even discovered, they might not be detained as he was not with them, and their necessities left them no alternative.

Immediately, however, on their flight being

discovered, a decree had been issued, condemning the whole family to death for having eluded justice and violently broken their prison : no sooner, therefore, did they appear in the streets of Rouen than they were seized and reconducted to their former dungeon.

In consideration of the circumstances of the case, the Duke of Normandy commuted the punishment of death, and sentenced them to perpetual imprisonment. Confined in a narrow and loathsome cell without hope of release, agonised at the reflection that her family were suffering every hardship, with no friend to take their part, and inhuman creditors greedy for their ruin, the wife of Hellequin was unable to support her accumulated afflictions, and, soon after her capture, died in despair. Her two daughters, having resolved to attempt an escape once more, took the desperate resolution of leaping from the high windows of their prison and their lives were sacrificed in the endeavour : they were dashed against the rocks beneath

and their mangled bodies told the horrid catastrophe.

What was now left for Hellequin and his four remaining sons! Their minds gave way under such a series of undeserved evils: proscribed, abandoned, houseless, destitute; the forest caverns their dwelling, roots and berries their food, all that they held dear torn from them, pity, remorse and justice denied them—all combined to harden their hearts and make them reckless of the future.

“Shall we perish with hunger!” exclaimed Hellequin, “we, who have committed no crime, but who sought that liberty the desire for which is implanted in our natures. Could our detention have satisfied the just claims of my creditors we would have submitted without a murmur; but since they persecute us thus, let us give them war for war—let us sell dearly the possessions which have been wrested from us. Our first care must be to procure the means of defence; and then, woe to whoever dares attack

those who fight, not only for their lives, but to revenge a mother and sisters' murder."

The four sons of Hellequin willingly agreed to this suggestion, and bade him depend on their procuring a supply of arms before night should close. They set out, taking with them their clubs, and stationing themselves on the high way, they attacked all who passed; and such was the valour and the strength they had derived from despair, that no Knight was able to withstand the fury of their onset.

In a short time horses and armour were in great quantities; then the father and sons quitted their retreat, made a vow never to separate, and began a war on all comers, the more sanguinary and cruel, as they had no mercy to expect if taken, and nothing to look forward to but an ignominious death.

Having once embarked in crime they abandoned themselves to every excess: they added to their number several discontented persons, and their band became every day more formi-

dable. They stormed castles, pillaged churches, destroyed villages: the possessions of the creditors of Hellequin were the first to suffer, and, in fine, they respected neither age, sex, nor condition, till the name of Hellequin's band became terrible throughout the country. Frequently, in the midst of their excesses, would the remembrance of their former virtues flash with vivid light on their minds, and tears of bitter remorse would burst from their eyes, but the thought of their wrongs and the prospect of fresh victims obliterated the transient feeling, and their only aspirations were for vengeance.

The complaints and murmurs of the people became loud and violent, and the Duke of Normandy was alarmed at the depredations of this resolute band, whose numbers had now so much augmented that an armed force was necessary to subdue them.

The Duke assembled his nobles, and it was agreed that measures should be taken to exterminate the fierce banditti; but before hostili-

ties commenced, a proclamation was issued, offering pardon to Hellequin and his children on condition of their abandoning their men and returning to their duty: this was done in consideration of the former services of Hellequin, his many noble qualities and the harsh treatment he had received: but the offer of mercy was too tardy, and the proposal was scornfully rejected by Hellequin.

“What!” cried he, “do the ungrateful dastards only recollect my services when they see me on the strongest side—when they have reason to fear the force of my arm? No, let them restore to me my wife, my daughters, and my former virtue, and I will submit.”

The Duke, awakened too late to a sense of justice, desired to know all the particulars of Hellequin's case, and discovered that his creditors, by usurious means, had more than doubled his debts: he therefore ordered a severe punishment to be inflicted on those who had been concerned in so dishonest a proceeding. He ex-

amined the evidence relative to the flight of the family, and decided that the jailors were worthy of punishment for negligence in their duty in suffering arms and various instruments to be introduced into the prison. As to the sentence of death passed at the time, he considered it just: because, though it was excusable in a prisoner to take advantage of the carelessness of his guards to procure his liberty, he was not to be pardoned for using violence, and the death of several of the sentinels, who fell by the hands of the fugitives, was proved.

This judgment, with all the reasons which induced it, was forwarded to Hellequin at the same time as his pardon, which might have been accepted had he and his sons been alone concerned. As it was, the Duke's herald was sent back with an answer of defiance.

An army, composed of the flower of the Norman nobility, the most experienced soldiers and citizens accordingly set forth to attack the robbers. Hellequin drew up his lines in order

of battle : though much inferior to the Duke in numbers, every one of his men was resolved to conquer or die where he stood.

The two forces were too much irritated to be content with simple skirmishes : scarcely were they brought front to front, than the engagement commenced in the most furious manner. The field was soon covered with dead. The banditti had entrenched themselves in their forest and it became surrounded by assailants : then the fight recommenced with redoubled carnage : the Normans disdained to ask quarter and Hellequin's band made it their practice neither to give nor receive it. Three of the sons of Hellequin, seeing all lost, after having performed prodigies of valour, rushed into the midst of the enemy's ranks and found the death they sought. The fourth, desperately wounded, was made prisoner and conducted to the Duke, who offered him his life and endeavoured to console him ; but he threw himself suddenly on the sword of a soldier who had taken him, and fell dead on the spot.

Hellequin was found amidst a heap of slaughtered Normans. He still breathed; they bore him to the tent of the Duke, who embraced him and promised to restore him to the rank and honor of his ancestors. "It is enough," said the unfortunate Knight; "this is the happiest fate that Heaven could have permitted me. I perish, the last of my family, as a just punishment for my misdeeds. I led my children into the abyss of error into which they fell. I urged them to take arms against their country. I had not courage to support misfortune and my virtue was not proof against its trials. May my country be appeased by my death—may Heaven be moved by my repentance!" These were his last words.

Those of his band who did not fall on the field of battle, threw themselves on their own swords, and not one was left of all their number.

Such was the history of the family of Hellequin! Heaven, more moved by his former

virtues and late repentance, than exasperated at his crimes, has condemned him and his race for a certain period to wander in the forest which was the scene of their misdeeds, exposed to all the inclemency of the seasons, and subject to all the accidents and pain to which human nature is liable, although possessed only of an aerial body.

They are permitted but now and then to appear to mortals, under whatever form they please, and when the term of their trial is at an end, they will be received to pardon."

The phantom knight here ended the relation of his adventures, to which Duke Richard had listened with amazement and commiseration: he then bestowed on the fearless warrior a scarf of rich stuff, of all the varied colours of the rainbow, in token of his having appeared to him.

Richard tied it over his armour, and when he looked up to return thanks for the present, he perceived that the fantastic forms of the whole company were growing by degrees indistinct,

and he was losing all trace of them. A thin cloud appeared where they had seemed to be, which dispersing in drops of crystal dew, fell on the turf and leaves around, and received the first rays of the rising sun, which, for he had remained all night in the wood, began to throw its gleams on the armour of the Fearless knight, who, rising from the fountain side, returned in a musing mood to his castle."

* In the glossary of Chalmers's Chaucer may be found the following account of this superstition, at the article *MEINIE*.

In the Canterbury Tales mention is made of *HURLEWAYES MEYNE*, which may be understood to relate to a particular set of ghostly apparitions which were used to run about the country at night, and were called in French "*La mesgnie de Hellequin* or *Herlequin*." The fullest account to be met with of these shadowy beings is in "*L'histoire de Richard sans Paour, Duc de Normandie, qui fut filz de Robert de Diable*."

The belief in such apparitions is certainly of great antiquity in Normandy, as they are mentioned by Ordericus Vitalis under the title of *GAMILIA HERLECHINI*, in a most extraordinary story related by him, A.D. 1091.

Gervase of Tilbury who wrote in 1211 mentions another set of apparitions which were called '*familia Arturi*.'

The circumstance of the many coloured scarf is rather curious and seems strangely to connect the legendary phantom robber with the Harlequin of pantomime celebrity.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ENTHUSIAST.

" I know that good exists, but that it is scarce and difficult to be found."

Mrs. RATCLIFFE.

THE gypsies had just ended their stories when the sound of a horn was heard at a distance, and several sprang to their feet. " It is the Count !" cried they, at the same time answering the challenge by a blast from a horn which one of them wore by his side. Its echoes had scarcely died away when their expected guest appeared in sight—he was welcomed by all with a shout and the name of " Musa ! Musa ! our

Count Musa!" flew from lip to lip, as the young chief leaped from a rock above which overhung the valley which was their resting-place, and took his station amongst them.

He was pale and grave, but there was a proud sparkle in his eye that bespoke an inward feeling of satisfaction to find himself acknowledged the head of his tribe.

"This is a loud note of greeting, my friends," said he, "and reminds me of our former selves before we were hunted like wolves from den to den and forced to lurk in caves and prowl like mere beggars from town to town. What say you, shall we once more assert our rights as men, and make an effort to regain our lost power. If I am your chief, mark me, I will not command a race of crouching slaves. I have a sword, and have learnt to use it, why should men who have arms and hearts be crushed by superior force without a struggle. We have begged and submitted long enough, let us be bold and we may yet be masters."

The fire with which he spoke **communicated** itself to his hearers, a sudden animation sparkled in their dark eyes as they crowded round him.

"Lead us on, Musa," was the general exclamation, "we only wanted a brave **chief**—we are no cravens—show us the way, and we will follow."

"I will not fail you," cried Musa **excited** by the approbation he met with; "I have of **late passed** some idle time in seeking for a vain good which has eluded my grasp. Before that my life was no quiet one—since last some *of* you have seen my face I have breathed the sharp air of the savage steppe—have lived for months amongst the wild steeds of a taboon, not one of whom but I have tamed at length to obey my voice. Oh! who that had known the mad pleasures of such an existence could sit down quietly to the dull life you are leading here!"

"Tell us, Musa—tell us," cried several voices, as with the true oriental feeling they

seated themselves round their chief on the ground and prepared to hear the narrative of his adventures. He required but little urging to gratify them, and went on in the following words :—

“ After we were obliged to disperse over Europe and seek our fortunes wherever it beckoned us, my star led me through many strange and untried ways till at length I paused on the banks of the Danube, when it was my chance to meet with a stranger whom I soon discovered by our signs to be one of our tribe. He was of Indian birth and a worshipper of the goddess Kali, he followed her laws as well as he could in whatever country he visited, but his conscience was not very nice, and he conformed in outward appearance to the creed which was most convenient at the time for his purpose. At the period when we met he was a horsedealer, and in extensive communication with most of the tabuntshiks of Mongolia.”

“ Explain, Musa,” said one of the tribe, “ we

are ignorant of the things you speak of, for few of us have travelled in those parts."

" Know, then," resumed Musa, " that in the enormous tract of country attached to that gigantic empire of Russia, to which, this paltry little kingdom is but a grain of dust, there exist wide plains whose distance the imagination can scarcely measure—where not a tree is to be seen for countless leagues, and not a human habitation appears, though you may journey for days to reach one. Over these arid wastes, flocks and herds are scattered far and near; but the riches of the steppe is in the immense taboons of wild horses which are there kept in subjection, and which supply the armies of the empire with steeds unrivalled in strength, swiftness and fierceness. The taboon, as the herd is called, in general consists of about a thousand horses, and he who has the management of this wild party leads a life of continued excitement. He must care neither for cold nor heat, fatigue nor hunger—he must

be indifferent whether his bed be on the scanty grass at night, or on the earth blackened to a cinder. He must not ask for the shelter of a roof, and though the hot wind blow on him like the blast of a furnace and his skin crack with its burning breath, he must not shrink—his saddle is his home, his throne—he is borne away by his fiery steed for leagues with the swiftness of an arrow, now in pursuit of a stray horse, now in chase of a wolf—the snow storm may drive against him, but it checks not his course; he battles with the elements, he braves their fury—he conquers all—he is free.”

“A glorious life,” exclaimed his hearers, “and he has gold in abundance?”

“He gains riches beyond the calculation of men who are content to beg or labour,” replied Musa, proudly—“he is held in esteem and in fear—he is known to be powerful, wild, resolute and necessary, and is treated accordingly.”

“And what are his pleasures?” asked one of the band.

"His enjoyments are many," answered the chief, "he rides sometimes from his herd, though at much risk, and joins some gay companions of the steppe—they recount their adventures, tell wondrous tales of daring, fill the wine-cup high, and cherish the joy the more as it is but transient. As soon as morning dawns he gallops back to his herd, and by dint of whip and spur, and aling and club, brings his refractory subjects to submission.* One of these daring men was he with whom I met—he recounted to me the pleasures of this free life and offered me his conduct to the steppes where, if I pleased, I might gain employment. I willingly accepted his offer; my knowledge of horses was little inferior to that usual to my tribe, and the existence of a taburetshik seemed one made for me. I embraced it, and for three years led this wild life amongst the eternal wastes—a foolish longing for my native Biscay lured me back. I thought to induce some of my tribe to return

* The preceding description of the taboons is derived from a very graphic account which appeared in the Colonial Magazine, in 1842.

with me to Russia, but I was thwarted—it matters little how—I was spell-struck with a fair face and forgot my duty. I was content to live in towns, to join bands of our tribe who wander idly from city to city seeking enjoyment and profit, and for awhile this life pleased me well. My uncle's death left a void in this, our most important band, and behold me ready to fill his place. Fear not that I shall again fall off from my duty. I have known disappointment, and am callous to all. My sister, Xarifa, shall be our Countess—I waited but the occasion to reclaim her; she is, as you know, in the castle of the Countess of Mezeraye, and will be ready to join us when the time shall serve. But she has been tenderly nurtured, and our present state suits her not—we must prepare that which is fitting for her reception, and then I bring her amongst you.”

This announcement was received with acclamation, and a murmur from the tents told that it was agreeable to the female listeners. Musa then proceeded to inform his tribe that he

possessed considerable wealth, and produced a well filled purse, which he divided amongst them, amidst their shouts and congratulations. He arranged new plans of action ; entered into the wants and necessities of the band, chose his officers, and in a short time, by his promptitude and decision, had remodeled the whole troop.

But Musa little knew amongst whom his star had conducted him. Enthusiastic, bold, romantic and aspiring, his mind filled to overflowing with fantastic notions of the dignity and grandeur of his race, he judged them as his ardent imagination directed. He knew nothing of them as they were in civilized lands—he was not aware of the petty arts by which they lived, the ignoble character of their general existence. He knew they were lawless, daring, revengeful, and malignant ; but this was considered as but their duty when such passions were brought into action against those who were not of their caste. To injure and deceive the Gentiles, as they called all

who did not belong to them, was a fundamental principle with the Gipsies—all the paltry details of their conduct he knew not, or blinded himself to them, and when he joined the band, of which he was now proclaimed leader, his mind was bent on the visionary idea of rendering them, and becoming himself exalted and powerful.

In several towns of Russia, in Servia, in Syria, where he had travelled, he had discovered, that amongst the rich and powerful of the land, there existed members of his creed : unsuspected indeed by those amongst whom they held a high station, but secretly following the rites of their mysterious faith while believed to be Christians, Mahomedans, or Jews, as circumstances required.

He had been informed that in France, even in the very capital, he should find persons living in the same manner, whom he would easily recognise by the same cabalistic address which had revealed to him the others.

He therefore, as soon as he had properly organised his troop, conducted some of them to Paris. A certain portion was always reserved, as it were, for practical attempts on the Gentiles : these were the dancers, singers, actors, and performers in various sleight-of-hand and mechanical exhibitions ; they were of the lower grade, but were generally commanded by an appointed officer who directed their move, and who, as necessity dictated, exerted his own talents in the same manner, though in general he did not condescend to do more than preside.

Those of higher rank predicted the future by the study of the stars, and they were consulted by all the influential persons in most of the great cities through which they wandered. In Paris, Musa soon found that scarcely a nobleman or lady at Court but was a ready dupe and an easy prey, for it was but seldom that any who really possessed the power deigned to exer-

cise it in revealing the hidden mysteries of fate—they feigned, merely with a view to their own advantage, to discover secret events, and having the means of knowing the affairs of most of the credulous persons who consulted them, they found well arranged falsehood as serviceable, or more so than disturbing the sacred mysteries which led to knowledge hidden from the vulgar.

To Musa, amongst a few, was accorded the dangerous gifts ; he had studied the art from his very infancy in many lands and under many masters, and he was a proficient in the fearful secrets which are appalling to learn, and useless to avert impending danger, although foreseen too clearly.

He had heard of the confederacy of Les Amis and pictured to himself something far different from the truth ; he was not prepared for the society of thieves and pick-pockets whom he discovered, and was immediately dis-

gusted with their proceedings ; he resolved to withdraw himself and those of his band whom he had appointed to meet him in Paris, and leaving the degraded members of his fraternity to their schemes, he had sought the wilds, once more, so congenial to his tastes and feelings.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MASTER.

"Madam, new guests are come."

SHAKSPERE.

It was at this time that the Prior of the neighbouring Convent, who had intrusted to the Countess the care of Xarifa, began to feel qualms of conscience at the indulgence which had allowed her to remain in the world instead of passing her life in prayer and penance to redeem the souls of her race, outcasts as they were from society and salvation. He accordingly consulted with Madeleine, and represented the necessity of Xarifa's adopting a different

course of life, now that she had attained an age capable of reflexion.

"She has wandered about in the woods," said the Prior, "without restraint too long, and now that you have laid your commands on her to roam no more, does she obey you? On the contrary, she has lately been seen in converse with a wild looking man, doubtless of her tribe. This must be prevented, and it will be well that you speak to her, lady, on the subject."

"She is become of late self-willed and sullen," replied the Countess, "and my own cares so occupy my mind that I am unable to attend to her. She shall be no longer suffered to lead this wild life, and I will see that she prepares immediately to assume the habit. Happy those whom it protects! Alas! there is in this deceitful world little that should make one regret to quit it."

Madeleine spoke feelingly, but she did not consider that as yet the world was new to Xarifa, and she had had no experience to

induce her to renounce its promises. When, therefore, she was somewhat harshly ordered to prepare herself for her new state of life, all the fire of her nature burst forth, all her passions were roused, and her determination to resist the tyranny exercised towards her became invincible. She did not attempt to conceal her indignation, and to proclaim her resolve not to submit, and the Countess and the Prior both saw with consternation, that their will was disputed in a manner they had little contemplated.

Xarifa was sitting in the deep embrasure of a window in the turret to which she had been confined since her rebellious refusal to obey the commands laid on her.

It was a bright night of summer, and the deep purple sky was studded with many stars. The long range of rugged mountains which stretched far into the distance assumed in the uncertain light fantastic shapes, whilst nearer rocks of basaltic formation rose in peaks and columns like phantoms, and seemed moving, as

gathering clouds passed along the face of the sky and occasionally obscured the rays of the myriad lamps hung in ether as if by fairy hands.

Xarifa gazed long and earnestly on the heavens, and, as was customary with her, uttered her thoughts in music.

XARIFA'S MUSINGS.

'Tis not a dream—too often
It comes to speak of woe,
I see its dim light glimmer,
And the signal well I know.
My day has long been shaded,
No sun for me may shine,
The blue sky all is darkened,
But yonder star is mine.
It rises, crown'd with clouds afar—
It glows---it beckons---'tis my Star.

It rose upon my childhood
When life seem'd new and fair,
The morrow gave an orphan
A heritage of care,
Its lurid rays at even
Above our tents were seen :
Next day beheld their ashes--
And death where peace had been,
It rose to tell of strife and war,
It flash'd—it sunk--it was my Star.

I saw it that last moment
When thou and I were met,
We watched its rays together,
We parted ere it set ;
The fatal spell was o'er me,
My fears thou couldst not share,
To thee its beams seem'd glory,
To me they told despair.
I watch'd those lurid streaks afar,
'Twas bright--extinct--it was my Star.

The reverie of the dreaming girl was interrupted by the entrance of the Countess Madeleine.

"Have you, Xarifa," she said severely, "no hymn to the Virgin which might better become you than wild strains like these. I am come to bid you prepare, to-morrow, to receive the holy Prior, and I trust you will have changed the rebellious tone which it has pleased you to assume of late ?"

"I have said," answered Xarifa, gloomily, "that I will never enter a convent ; why am I importuned further ?"

"Ungrateful girl !" said the Countess, "have you no touch of love to me for all the kindness

shown to you from infancy, that you thus rudely thwart wishes which are for your welfare. I know some of your lawless tribe have of late been seen hovering about the country, I would protect you from them, and how so effectually as by placing you in the asylum the Prior's care has provided for you."

"Banish me to my tribe," said Xarifa, scornfully, "I do not fear them."

"Your fierce, wild nature, I see, is not to be tamed," returned Madeleine, "I was to blame to hope it. What can your kindred, whom you know not, be to you—if you have no affection for those who have brought you up, and tended you, you can have none for them."

"Not love them!" cried Xarifa starting to her feet, while her eyes flashed fiercely—"do not believe it, lady. They are proscribed, condemned, reviled, and trampled on—for this cause, even for this, I love them with a passion no tyranny can subdue. You see those stars glittering in countless numbers—to you they

seem confused, you cannot read their language; but to my race they are as letters in a printed book : the fate of nations is revealed in them ; for they are the mighty of the earth, though the proud, like you, may scorn them."

Madeleine shrunk back as she listened to the words of the enthusiastic girl, and felt a shudder stealing over her, for she was not without the superstition of her age, and the wild country in which her infancy had been nursed was full of strange legends and wonders, even yet unexplained in her mind.

"Sleep now, Xarifa," she said in a more gentle tone, "and to-morrow we will talk further on your future prospects."

So saying she closed the door of the turret, and left her prisoner to reflection. Xarifa, on being left alone, burst into tears, more subdued by the gentle manner of her mistress, than by the harsh style she had assumed before.

"Why will they drive me to be ungrateful to them," said she. "I would love the

Countess if she would let me ; but what is she to me but a cold mistress, who expects attachment from me as she would from a pet animal, who has no will, no feeling in common with herself. Oh, Musa ! why am I separated from you ? why does not the glory of our race rise once again, and the star of our destiny overcome the clouds which have too long obscured it ?”

Xarifa sat at her window still looking out at the waning stars till dawn broke over the mountains, and the sun appeared in misty beauty. As she bent her view along a rocky path which led towards the castle, she perceived a horseman advancing slowly in that direction. He was much muffled in his cloak, and his hat was pressed over his eyes, but there was that in his air and carriage which her quick eye could not mistake, and she was certain she recognised Count Felix.

“ He is happily returned,” said she, “ I have at least one friend in the castle, to him I will

appeal and surely he will interfere and save me from a fate I so much dread."

She retired from the window and threw herself on her bed, where she forgot her sorrows in sleep, while the horseman, who was indeed Count Felix, returned to his now often neglected home, rode up to the great gates and rang the bell. The roused porter opened to his lord, and Felix, ordering that no one should be disturbed till the accustomed time, took his way to the suite of apartments allotted to him, and there reposed himself after a journey which, to judge by his fatigued appearance, must have been long.

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